

2013 Calgary Area May Species Count, Part A

Coordinated, and report compiled by Terry Poulton

THANK YOU to everyone who participated in the 2013 May Species Count, and to those who offered helpful advice, and corrections, during the report preparation.

This report is intended to be read with its companions **Part B**, and the Multi-year Chart (1979-2013), available also at the Nature Calgary website.

The 2013 Calgary area May Species Count was conducted on May 25 and 26 by **88+ observers**. This report has been supplemented with information from other observers reporting independently, including on AlbertaBird and eBird. **218 species** were recorded, and another **2 species** were seen during the Count Week. **64304** individual birds were recorded.

Many of the participants have done the count, and even the same areas, for many prior years. Others very kindly are flexible and able to count birds where needed to ensure a complete survey more or less consistent with previous years. A number of long-term observers were able to re-join the group after an absence of 1 or 2 years – thanks you and welcome back!. The record number of observers includes participants from the Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park, and the Society for Life Long Learning, who accompanied Gus Yaki and Bob Lefebvre on their routes. Special thanks to those 2 individuals for facilitating the participation of the new volunteers. A few people volunteered from out of the blue; please let us hear from you again next year. These are all very welcome new observers, some of them young people who will form the next generation of Calgary birders. There are still some volunteers who are unknown to me, but thank you all for ensuring another successful count. Long-time experienced observers know where to find important habitat, how to look for less obvious or unusual species, and have been very helpful with mentoring new observers, including myself. As always, the participants, all volunteers, were extremely dedicated and many put in long hours and covered great distances on messy routes to provide excellent coverage. Some of the participants surveyed more than one area while others spent more than the usual time in their area to complete their coverage.

The last weekend of May in Calgary covers the later part of the migration for large birds flying farther north, eg. Snow Goose, Tundra Swan; peak or late migration for smaller bird, eg. small shorebirds, as well many local breeders; and the early arrival of some local and marginally farther north breeders, as judged from eBird bar charts for their "County" of Calgary, which approximates our Calgary Count Circle.

An attempt to derive meaningful trends from the large amount of data that is available since 1979 is in progress. Some observers feel that the May counts provide useful indications of survival rates on wintering grounds and can contribute to general population trends; others offer a variety of valid reasons to question the comparative value of the data. These reasons generally relate to the timing and nature of the Count, but also to deficiencies in the data, particularly those from earlier years.

This annual count always falls on the last weekend of May, at the end of migration through the area for some species and near the beginning for others. Therefore, small variations of arrival date for any reason, and this is a time of generally unsettled weather, can mean seeing these species in abundance or not at all from year to year. For many species, the strong instinct to reach breeding grounds quickly

results in a short migration period compared to that in the fall, less chance of overlap with the count weekend, and the possibility of Calgary being jumped over or bypassed. The count numbers at this time of year are therefore much more erratic and unpredictable than for those where bird populations are more settled, such as during breeding season or on winter grounds. For the birder, this limitation is offset by the potential for sighting unusual species.

Weather can affect not only the detailed timing of migration through the area, but also whether birds are forced down or encouraged to overfly the area. Snow, rain, flooding, mud, wind all are factors in the detectability of birds, and the ease of travel on many routes. On the positive side, snow-covered fields can bring lots of birds to the roadways or fences; while wind will keep them hidden and quiet or carry sounds for longer distances.

The May Species Count is not ruled by rigorous protocols. Volunteers have varying styles in the manner in which they cover their routes, within limits learned from their mentors, e.g. some starting very early and staying late in the day, others not so much; and some routes require a lot of area driving, others provide detail from long walks. Long-time observers, especially those that have experience with other more rigorous counts such as the Breeding Bird Surveys, undoubtedly provide more thorough and consistent annual data than new-comers. As more of the latter join the count and take over their own routes, the consistency of the reports from year to year is bound to vary somewhat, and all of us are constantly learning. Additionally, those routes that are not counted in the same way by the same experienced individuals year after year should be expected to provide less consistent data.

Urban sprawl has doubled since 1979, together with increased park creation and usage, traffic, cats and other hazards, and surrounding rural areas have been significantly altered by development of many kinds, including habitat modification and bird feeding. The City and surrounding areas are engaged in habitat conservation and rehabilitation, as is the Western Irrigation District which covers some of the SE corner of the area.

A primary focus of any analysis must be the plight of declining species. In this regard, Ross Dickson's report of 1990 pointed out that "hot spots" with favorable habitat will attract birds preferentially and "will be the last places to show the results of species number declines." Declines will show up first in marginal habitats/areas. Focussing on interesting habitat also means that even the most consistent count results are not regionally representative.

Dickson summarized a 1979 Alberta Naturalist regarding the origins and rationale for the Calgary May Species count, as part of a series of province-wide counts that would be more valid for comparisons [year to year I assume] if the same "birdy" and accessible areas were counted annually. His summary of that 1979 report provided several rationales for the counts: 1) gain an indication of numbers and note annual changes, 2) measure progress in migration, 3) provide a format for education of participants, and 4) encourage cooperative efforts toward an understanding of local natural history. Regarding the first 2 of these objectives, I am still not aware of any compiling organization that archives and analyses trends on a large-scale regional basis, eg. North America.

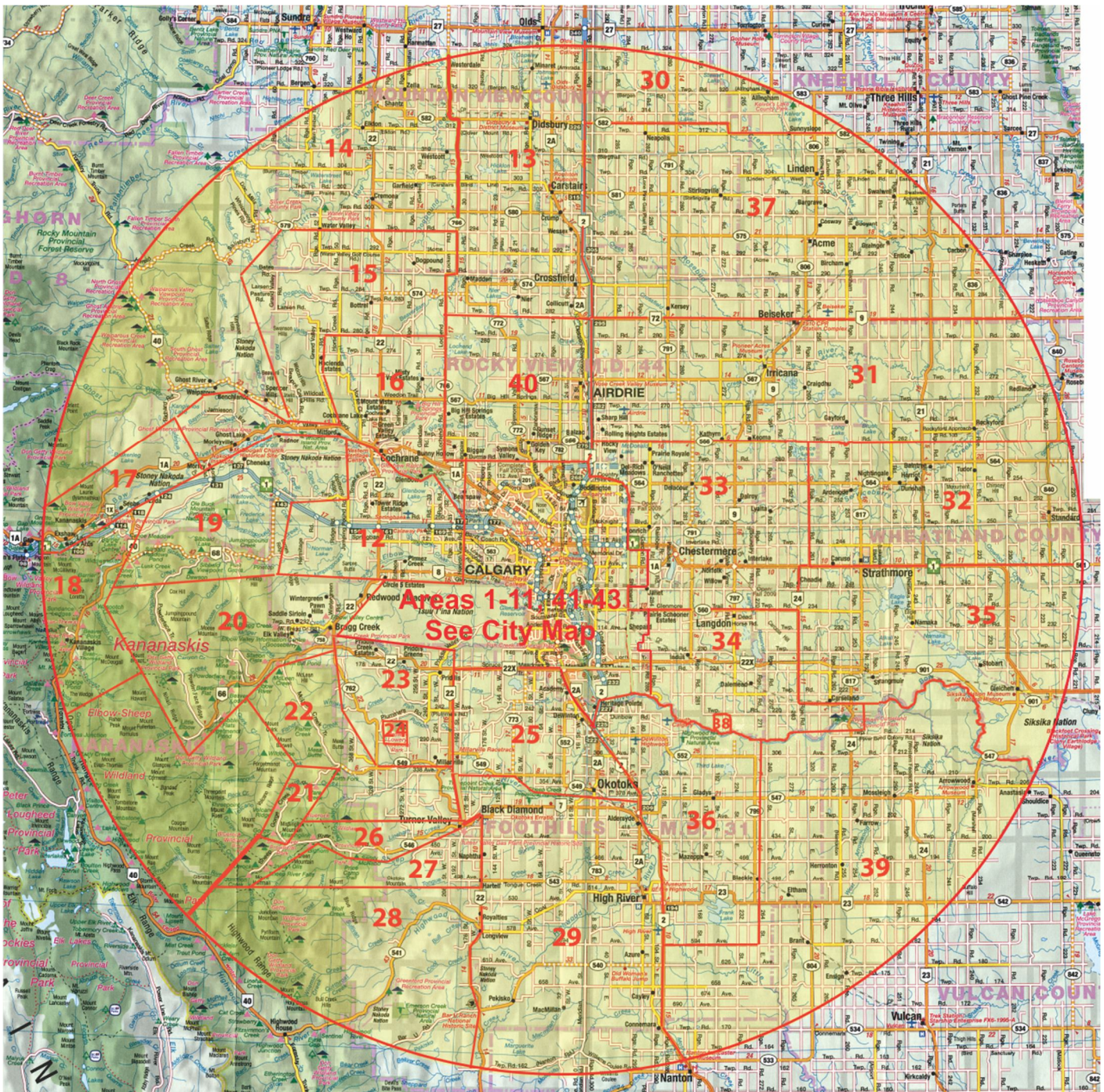
Early reporting by participants in public forums such as AlbertaBird serves an additional benefit for alerting others to the presence of unusual species.

For many of us, it is an incentive to get out into nature when "spring fever" arrives, as much as it competes with gardening needs.

Area Covered:

20114 sq km: a 80 km-radius circle centered on the Centre Street Bridge in Calgary. The rim extends to just south of Olds in the North, just north of Nanton in the south, just west of Exshaw and Highway 40 in the west and just past Standard in the east. This is a vast area and it is an impossible task to cover every nook and cranny within the circle. While some teams try to cover all of the accessible habitat within their area, there is an expectation to concentrate on the most important "birdy" areas within their assignments. Within Calgary, only specific areas are covered, mainly parks with natural habitat along the Bow River, Elbow River and Fish Creek. This means that the numbers of common urban species are vastly under-represented.

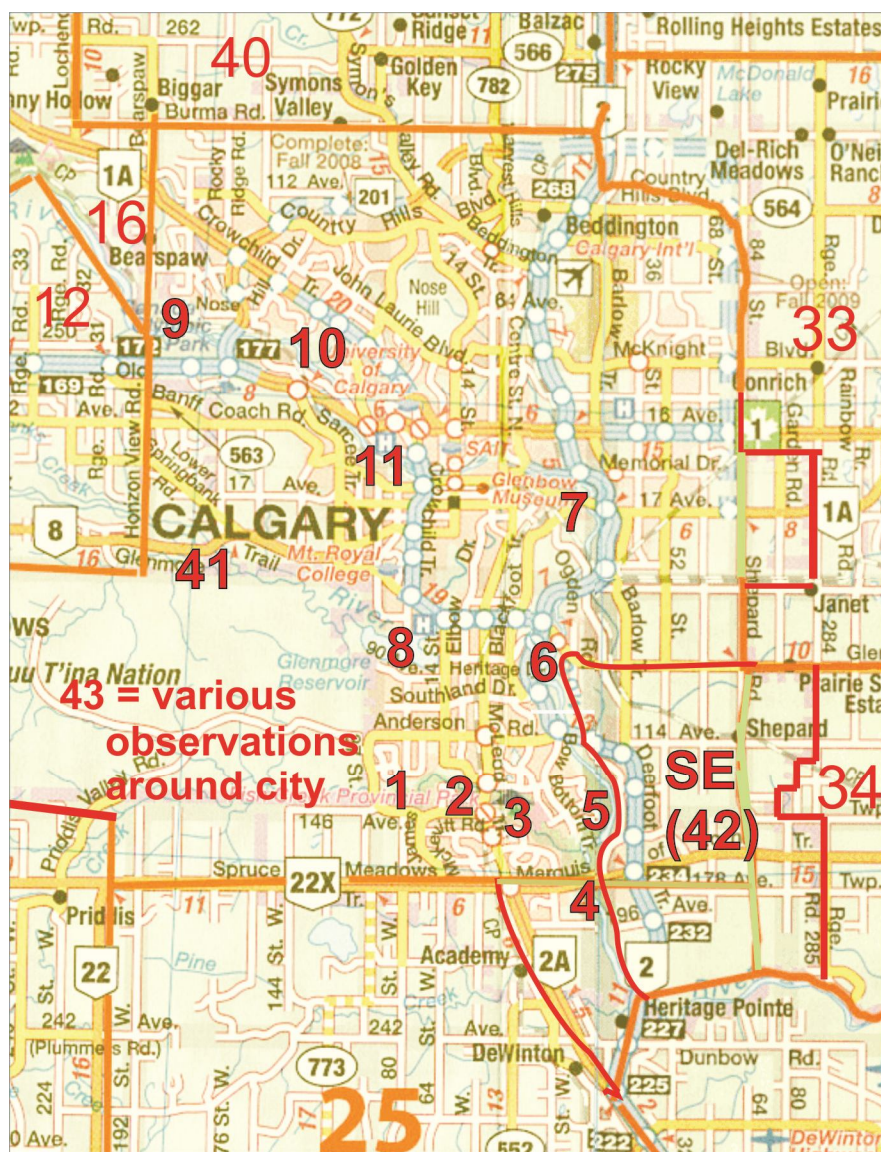
Count Circle Map



This Count Circle map has been updated to show the current western Boundaries of Areas 33, 34 (and eastern boundary of Area 42) which were altered before the 2010 count to match the new City Limit, in order to better represent increasing urbanization. The eastern banks of the Bow River in this area are counted by Teams 4 & 5, from the west side of the river.

City of Calgary Areas

12 areas were covered in the city in 2013 – 4 in Fish Creek Provincial Park, 5 others along the Bow River, 2 along the Elbow River, and 1 in SE Calgary where there is a great deal of water and some landfills. **144** species were recorded during Count Days within the city in 2013. Most developed areas and many parks within the City are not covered, so that common urban species are vastly under-reported. Area 43 accommodates sightings that have been reported outside of the specified areas, including some with interesting habitat wherever it has been possible to place observers, eg. Confederation Park, Confluence Park this year.



Area 1: FCPP 37st to Bridge 6
Area 2: FCPP Bridge 6 to Macleod Trail
Area 3: FCPP Macleod Trail to Bridge 13 (Glennfield):
Area 4: FCPP Burnsmead South to Lafarge Meadows
Area 5: FCPP Mallard Point to Burnsmead
Area 6: Carburn Park to Beaverdam Flats
Area 7: Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Pearce Estate Park

Area 8: Glenmore Reservoir/Weaselhead
Area 9: Bowness Park to Bearspaw Dam
Area 10: Bowmont Natural Area
Area 11: Lowery Gardens/Edworthy Park
Area 41: Griffiths Woods
Area 42: Shepard and SE Calgary
Area 43: Other (unassigned areas of Calgary)

Areas Out of the City:

Foothills Areas

NORTHWEST FOOTHILLS

Area 12: Springbank Area
Area 14: Water Valley North
Area 15: Water Valley South
Area 16: Cochrane North
Area 17: Bow Valley PP and Exshaw
Area 18: Kananaskis Country
Area 19: Sibbald Flats
Area 20: Elbow River Basin
Area 21: Gorge Creek Road

SOUTHWEST FOOTHILLS

Area 22: Millarville Area
Area 23: Priddis Area
Area 24: Brown/Lowery Provincial Park
Area 25: South of Calgary
Area 26: Upper Sheep River Basin
Area 27: Southside Sheep River Basin
Area 28: Highwood River Basin west of Longview
Area 29: Central Highwood River Basin

Prairie Areas

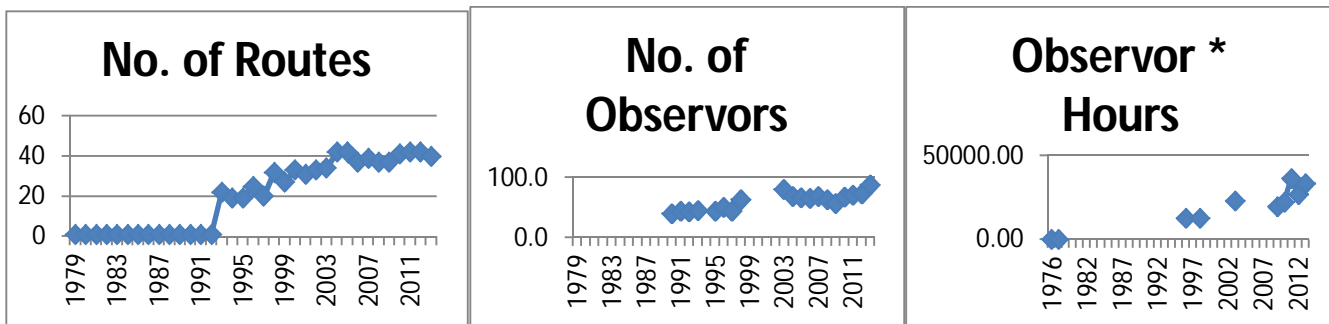
Area 13: Crossfield
Area 30: Didsbury East Bluebird Trail
Area 31: Irricana
Area 32: Strathmore North
Area 33: East of Calgary
Area 34: Carseland/Dalmead/Langdon Reservoir

Area 35: South of Strathmore
Area 36: Frank Lake and High River East
Area 37: Acme/Carbon
Area 38: Mckinnon Flats
Area 39: Brant/Ensign
Area 40: West of Airdrie

Background (some of the comments on early counts adapted from 2010 report by Brian Elder.)

The Calgary and area May Species count was initiated in 1976, was missed in 1977, and was re-started in 1978. The initial 1976 count was conducted by Greg Wagner who continues to count in the Frank Lake area – thanks Greg! Greg and Peter Allen, covered 320 miles (517 km) in 16 hours in 1976, seeing 102 species south and west of the city, within 4 of the currently designated areas. The 1978 count covered only 2 areas, with 5 participants, producing 52 species. For the early counts, only a single paragraph and a data column for “High River/Calgary” is available, in the “The Alberta Naturalist”. Thereafter the effort and participation grew rapidly and has stabilized somewhat since 1998, but particularly since 2004. A significant increase in the number of participants beginning in 2011 results from recruitment efforts and greater public interest and awareness, and ensures that the Count will be continued long-term. Previous coordinators and reporters have included Jim Washbrook, Ross Dickson, Bill Walker who apparently produced the first computerized database, Milt Spitzer, and Brian Elder. Each of them introduced new ideas and greater detail into the reports. Brian passed on to me the archive of historical reports, and brought the database of results up to 2010 into its current form. The surviving records before 1993 are sparse, but a multi-year comparison was produced for 1979-1990 by Ross Dickson, and this data set was augmented up to 1995 by Bill Walker.

With increasing participation, the routes too have evolved over the years. Reports prior to 1993 did not differentiate routes or sub-areas within the Circle, reporting only summaries from the entire area, shown in the graph below as a single route. There is some indication of the areal breakdown in the archival record in 1991, but it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons with more current years. In some cases, observations in individual yards were identified as such. From 1994, the number of well-designated routes increased rapidly until about 2004, but the numbering system used in this report has only been in place since a re-organization in 2006. Since then there have been minimal adjustments, including shifting of boundaries in the SE part of the city, and the addition of new areas broken out from earlier more extensive ones. The coordinator attempts to ensure that these areas are well covered, but invariably there has been some variation from year to year depending on the availability of experienced, which is most likely to show up in the relative numbers of those species that are restricted to particular areas.

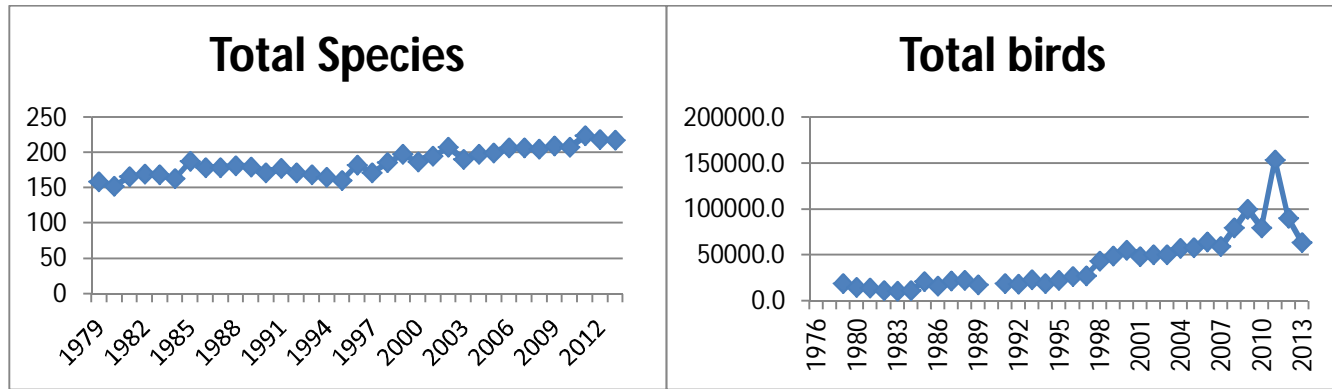


We do not generally have enough information to produce reliable "Party-Hour" figures that would allow us to conduct the usual normalization procedure, although we are investigating the possibility that the Observer and/or Route data can serve as a proxy for the more recent years.

Number of Species and Birds:

The number of species seen in 2011-2013 is similar, and has increased significantly since the inception of the count. This is possibly affected to a certain extent by the better coverage of the count area. However, with competent observers covering the entire circle since 1979, it would not be expected that the number of increase in routes and observers during the period since 1993 would have a proportionate influence on the bird numbers. Indeed, the number of species should stabilize around the average number of species likely to be present consistently in the area at the time of year of the count, plus or minus the odd accidental vagrant or unreliable transients, and minus those that are very few in number and very difficult to detect, even if they are "regulars". At 218 to 224 species, we are seeing regularly these last 3 years 75% of the cumulative total of species (**294**) that the Calgary May count has recorded since 1979.

Ross Dickson's compilation for the 1979-1990 counts indicated a cumulative total of **244** species at that time. So, over the last 23 years, we have added 50 species to the total, or 20.5% (average 2.17 species/year). This reduction in the average growth of species (of 135), from 159 in 1979 to 294 in 2013, or 4.67 species/year, is consistent with the levelling off to be expected as species which are unreported in the most recent years are increasingly the vagrant birds accidentally farther out of their normal range. (This comment does not apply to the absence this year of the 4 missing species noted below that are reported regularly but in very small numbers.)



The total number of individual birds has returned to pre-2008 levels, primarily a result of fewer Franklin's Gulls in the Frank Lake area, and to a lesser extent of California Gulls at Langdon Reservoir, both of which had a strong influence on the large count numbers in the last few years, and which have been attributed to disturbance of nesting habitat by high water levels in these irrigation reservoirs, in a generally wet year. This is in spite of the 2013 count having benefitted from a record number of observers, including the renewed presence of several long-time experienced observers who were away in the two preceding years. However a number of species, identified further below, were counted in record or near record numbers in 2013.

In concert with the number of Observers (and therefore Observer-Hours and better Area coverage), the number of birds reported increased greatly since the count began, until 2012. These upward trends, which generally and clearly contradict the results of other more standardized counts, eg. Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird surveys, are similar for many of the common species and groups counted, and generally **DO NOT** reflect bird population trends but rather areal coverage. However, with relative stabilization of the number of Observers and Area coverage since 2004, perhaps the last decade's numbers are more meaningful. In the Total birds chart above, **the numbers to the left are disproportionately low**, because of the lesser quality of areal coverage, with fewer observers available. These factors need to be considered when viewing the accompanying Multi-Year chart as well. In this graph above, **the numbers to the right show unusual peaks**, due to the exceptionally high numbers of Franklin's Gulls observed in 2009 and 2011.

2013 Count Particulars

Participants: 88+, identified under each area. Additional specific contributions from Bob Storms, Lane Robson, Sally Quon, and the Inglewood Bird Banding Society thanks to Michelle Dagg and Doug Collister. Other individual items have been picked up from AlbertaBird and eBird.

Weather:

Generally pleasant. A wet spring meant high water levels and muddy roads and trails in some places, snow in shady areas and higher elevations in the Foothills

Day 1: Temp. 0 to 17 °C, cooler in Foothills.

Wind speed: 0 to 35 km/hr. Precipitation: some rain. Comments: Sunny with Cloudy Periods, locally overcast, gusty winds in Foothills.

Day 2: Temp. -1 to 23 °C, cooler in Foothills. Wind speed: 0 to light in most places. Precipitation: None in most places. Comments: Sunny, calm, to variable cloud.

Team Distance/Hours:

Total team mileage: 3891 km, by vehicle 3660, on foot 231 km

Total team hours: 376 hr, by vehicle 188 hr, on foot 188 hr.

This year, two areas previously covered were not counted – Area 1 (FCPP 37st to Bridge 6), and Area 38 (Mckinnon Flats). Area 3 (FCPP - Glennfield east, to ponds below Midnapore and area to west by Garden Centre) was covered for the first time in many years, thanks to the new involvement of Deanna Downton-Julian, assisted by Anne Belton, Helen Hebb, and Jennifer Hilborne.

Bird Highlights

21 **Red-throated Loons** were reported by Tim Allison and Amy Darling from Barrier Lake along Highway 40 (Area 18).

These last two species are new for the count. These were recorded on AlbertaBird, and in a Rare Bird Report by Tim Allison.

Broad-winged Hawk has now been seen for the third consecutive year, after a hiatus since 1986.

52 **Sabine's Gulls** were reported at Frank Lake by Jerry Pilny, Joan and Malcolm MacDonald, and Greg Wagner. The numbers for the last 3 years (39, 47, 52) show a regular slight increase. The only previous appearance on the count was 31 in 1996.

An **Arctic Tern** was seen by Brian Elder and Ray Woods on Harmattan Reservoir (Area 14), one was seen previously in 1986.

A **Sage Thrasher** was seen by Sid Andrews, Laura Ewtushik and Mike Mulligan in the City of Calgary in SE Calgary (Area 42).

A **Western Sandpiper** was recorded from the Carseland-Dalmead-Langdon area (Area 34) by Tony Timmons, Al Borgardt, Howard and Lyn Heffler.

Gray-cheeked Thrush was reported from near Mossleigh (Area 39) by Rob Worona, from Eagle Lake Campground (Area 35) by Lenora and Dick Flynn, and reported one and from Frank Lake (Area 36) by Greg Wagner. This ties the 2002 record of 3 for this species, which is reported rarely during the count.

Jim Foley, Jack Blair and Jim St Laurent reported a **Western Bluebird** from west of Airdrie (Area 40).

A **Bay-Breasted Warbler** was reported near the south ponds in the Mt. Lorette Natural Area, Kananaskis (Area 18) by Bill Wilson. Previously, single individuals were seen only twice (1980 and 20110).

6 **Lark Sparrows** (a record number) were reported from Irricana area (Area 31) by Kingsley Blades.

5 **Lark Buntings** were reported, from 4 different areas. These have only been reported on the count twice before.

[Note: A possible Bar-tailed Godwit and Tri-colored Heron reported on AlbertaBird (see discussions there) are no longer considered to be valid observations.]

Other species seen during count week:

11 **Whimbrels** were reported by Joan and Malcolm Macdonald and Jerry Pilny at Frank Lake May 24.

Richard Clarke watched a flock of 17 **Parasitic Jaegers** in Basin 2 at Frank Lake (Area 36) in the late morning of Tuesday, May 28. This is probably an unprecedented-sized flock of this species in the Province (from AlbertaBird).

Just beyond count week, Pat Mitchell reported (June 2 on AlbertaBird) an **Eastern Bluebird** brooding eggs, and mated with a male Mountain Bluebird north of Big Hill Springs Provincial Park. It must have been in the area during the count.

Missing Species:

Some species that have appeared somewhat regularly for the duration of the count in small numbers were totally missed this year: **Herring Gull**, **Barred Owl**, **Sprague's Pipit** and **Nelson's Sparrow**. If anyone has a record of these species during the May 22-29 count week period, I will be happy to include it in a future version of this report.

Species previously more abundant, but rarely seen recently:

A few species that appeared in small numbers in early years of the count are seen rarely or not at all more recently (see accompanying Multi-Year Chart), eg. **Sharp-Tailed Grouse**, **Rough-Legged Hawk**, **Burrowing Owl**, **Long-eared Owl**, **Philadelphia Vireo**, **Chestnut-collared Longspur**, **Baird's Sparrow**.

Noteworthy Observations:

NB: ONLY NOTEWORTHY OBSERVATIONS ARE INDICATED IN THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION. Species or Groups not mentioned are represented by numbers that are very small, generally consistent with previous averages or with the general increase associated with increased Observer numbers, or in an erratic fashion that shows no obvious trend. The numbers upon which the charts are based will be available as an accompanying Multi-year Chart, 1979-2013, also on the Nature Calgary website.

Besides the well known recent immigrants, **Black-necked Stilt, White-faced Ibis, Eurasian Collared-Dove, House Finch**, several other species are noteworthy for having appeared somewhat regularly on the count only in the last 10-20 years, although only in small numbers (some were “regulars” in small numbers prior to 1993, but were not recorded again until more recently): **Trumpeter Swan, Greater Scaup, Harlequin Duck, Golden Eagle, Sandhill Crane, Northern Pygmy Owl, Pacific Wren (as Winter Wren), Brown Creeper, Townsend’s Warbler, Lark Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Bobolink**, and **Red Crossbill**. **Wood Duck** and **Purple Martin** also only appear in the count in recent years, since 1992 and 1999 respectively.

Waterfowl:

The number of **Trumpeter Swans** (12) reported is the 2nd highest since the count began, exceeded by 25 in 2008. Both trumpeters and Tundra Swan were seen in unusual, but small numbers in that year.

The number of **Hooded Merganser** (33), and **Common Merganser** (256) are record highs by a significant number.

Record numbers also, but barely, of **Canvasback** (378), **Ring-necked Ducks** (263), and **Lesser Scaup** (1592).

The number of **Common Goldeneye** (359) was exceeded only in 2012 (411), **Barrow’s Goldeneye** (42) was the third highest, exceeded only in 2006 (60) and 2011 (75), and **Mallard** (2085) was exceeded only in 2009 and 2012.

The general correlation of increasing numbers of many waterfowl with increasing Observer-Hours does not permit, at this stage, a firm correlation with increased attention to wetland preservation nor winter open-water conditions along the Bow River in Calgary.

Some waterfowl species are essentially flat-lined since 1979, including the few laggard migrant **Trumpeter** and **Tundra Swans** and **Northern Pintails**.

Two species show a short-term drop off in recent years, in spite of the stabilized observer numbers: **Bufflehead, Wood Duck**.

Game Birds:

Gray Partridge were reported in the **lowest** numbers (19) since 1997, while **Ruffed Grouse** and **Ring-necked Pheasant** are relatively stable, if erratic, since 1999.

Loons: Besides the unusual appearance of 21 **Red-throated Loons** in Kananaskis area, **Common Loons** appeared in record numbers (32).

Grebes:

Eared Grebes were reported in next-to-record numbers in 2013 (3920). The record (4200) was in 2012. These are large jumps from previous years.

Western Grebes show a fairly consistent drop-off from highs in the mid-1990s, and **Red-necked Grebes** from 2006 to 2011.

Pelicans: **American White Pelicans** were reported in the lowest numbers (25) since 1997.

Cormorants: The number of **Double-crested Cormorants** was a record (269).

Wading Birds:

The number of **Great Blue Herons** was a record number (72), approached only by 68 in 2006.

6 **Sandhill Cranes** were reported, exceeded only in 2008 (8).

White-faced Ibis, first recorded in 2000, appeared in near record numbers (118), exceeded only in 2012 (134).

Diurnal Raptors:

There were record numbers in 2013 of **Osprey** (32), **Bald Eagle** (26), **Cooper's Hawk** (12), although none by large numbers. **Swainson's Hawk** was reported in near record numbers (263).

A record of **Broad-winged Hawks** (3) in 2013 – this species dropped off the chart after 1987, only re-appearing as singletons in the last 2 years.

Similarly, **Rough-legged Hawk** (2 recorded in 2013 in Springbank area (Area 12)) has been sparsely recorded since 1990, and not at all since 1998, perhaps a result of the dates of its migration barely overlapping with the May Species Count.

Peregrine Falcon (4 reported) matches record numbers, and the number of **Prairie Falcon** (4) was exceeded only twice since 1979. These larger falcons appear only in small numbers, but it is interesting that more than one of each is commonly reported in recent years, in contrast with earlier count periods.

Shorebirds:

A record number of **Black-necked Stilts** (127), **Spotted Sandpiper** (371) were reported, matching record numbers of **Greater Yellowlegs** (9), near-record numbers of **Long-billed Curlew** (23), poor 2nd best numbers of **Long-billed Dowitcher** (46), and 3rd best numbers of **Least Sandpiper** (32) and **Stilt Sandpiper** (30). **Red-necked Phalarope** were well represented (407), exceeded only in 1985 (1027), 1997 (790), and 2002 (659).

Those Local Breeders that do not show an increase in numbers coinciding with the increase in Observers and better Areal coverage include **American Avocet, Marbled Godwit, Willet, Upland Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope.**

Gulls, Terns:

Franklin's Gull was recorded in the lowest numbers (2606) since 1987, a far cry from >100,000 in 2011

The number of **Ring-Billed Gulls** (98 in 2013) fallen off in a striking fashion from 4000+ in 1990 and 1993.

The modest number of **California Gulls** (1548) does not approach the >5000 recorded in 2011, primarily at the Langdon Reservoir breeding colony, and in 1995 and 1996.

Bonaparte's Gull (50 in 2013) and normally in the 0-20 range was exceeded only in 2002 (82) and 1991 (223 individuals). **Sabine's Gull** has shown increasing numbers since 2011 (39, 47, 52), but was not recorded on the count previously.

A small fraction of the low gull numbers may be partly compensated by the record high number (1211) of unidentified gulls.

The total number of Gulls & Terns was at relatively low levels in the 2013 count, compared with the high numbers seen previously in 1995, 1999 and 2003, probably largely due to high water levels throughout the area which would have inhibited local breeding.

Forster's Tern was reported in near record, but still small, numbers (87) , nearly matching 2011 (88). **Common Tern** does not show the upward increase since 1979 exhibited by so many other birds.

Doves, Pigeons:

Rock Pigeons (674) remain within the high range between 500 and 900 since they broke 500 in 2004.

Eurasian Collared-Doves maintained their relatively high numbers in the 2013 count (30, compared with 28 and 31 for the two previous years), since first appearing on the count in 2004.

Mourning Doves were counted in record numbers (127), growing continually since they exceeded 70 in 2009.

Owls:

Great-horned Owls were again present in relatively high numbers (26); the record 27 was hit last year. Other owls were reported in very modest numbers, as always.

Hummingbirds:

Rufous Hummingbirds hit a record number (19). Others were modest.

Kingfishers:

Belted Kingfisher matched previous near highs of 19 set in both 1986 and 2000, but missed the record of 24 (1988).

Woodpeckers:

Red-naped Sapsucker matched the high number (28) of 2009, but did not reach the record of 33 (2012).

Downy Woodpeckers (51) and **Northern Flicker** (219) set records.

Pileated Woodpecker (8) nearly reached the record of 9 from 2012.

Other species numbers are not noteworthy. Overall, the rise in the number of Woodpeckers/Route, even after 2004 when route numbers stabilized, is impressive, perhaps because of more observers in the larger parties covering forested park areas, and because of the increased number of urban and rural feeders.

Flycatchers:

The 2013 numbers for the various Flycatcher and Kingbird species are unremarkable.

Vireos:

Cassin's Vireo was recorded in record numbers (16), as was the total for **Solitary Vireo (20)**, including Cassin's and **Blue-Headed Vireo** as well as the pre-1999 "**Solitary Vireo**" determinations. Other vireo numbers are unremarkable.

Corvids:

Gray Jays were record in record numbers (87).

Blue Jays, at 33, were 3rd highest on record (44 in 2009, and 36 in 2010), perhaps a beneficiary of increased feeders.

Black-Billed Magpies, at 944 hit near record numbers (995 in 2005).

The number of **American Crow** (714) was exceeded only in 2005 (868) and 2010 (727).

Common Raven (345) approached the record of 394, set in 2011.

All these species show impressive increases since about 1999-2000, even after Observer numbers stabilized somewhat. Some were not abundant in early years of the count, in spite of their being generally conspicuous birds.

Swallows:

Purple Martin does not appear in the May count records before 2000, in spite of the number of "Purple Martin houses" that could be seen around the city. With occasional exceptions, the current numbers come from the Chestermere Lake community (Area 33).

Violet-Green Swallow, at 41, hit a high number, exceeded only by the exceptional 214 reported from north of Cochrane (Area 16) in 2010.

Northern Rough-Winged Swallow numbers (84) are relatively low, and suggest some mild degree of downtrend in recent years.

Numbers of other species are highly erratic, and relatively unremarkable but the somewhat higher highs and higher lows suggest a relative stability in recent years in the Calgary end-of-May count, since 2004 when route numbers stabilized.

Small forest birds:

Mountain Chickadee, **Brown Creeper**, and **Cape May** and **Townsend's warblers** have a long-term presence in the count, but are reported in record numbers in recent years.

Boreal Chickadees were high at 26 (the record of 31 was set in 1988, and 28 were seen in 2002).

Brown Creepers were seen in record numbers (13).

Winter Wren (Pacific assumed) hit a high of 4, as it has twice before.

The number of **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (251) was exceeded only in 2006 (314).

Some of the forested parks and river valleys are better covered in recent years and by larger teams; of this group, only the chickadees would have benefitted from increasing numbers of feeders.

Thrushes:

Mountain Bluebird (239) exceeded 200, last seen in the 4 years from 2004 to 2007, when they reached 369 in 2005.

Gray-Cheeked Thrush (3) ties the 2002 record for this species, which is rarely reported during the count.

Warblers:

Tennessee Warbler was counted in large numbers (183), exceeded only in 2002 (191) and 2009 (230). As in the previous 2 years, **Cape May Warbler** was present in relatively high numbers (17), nearly hitting the 2012 high of 19.

Townsend's Warbler matched the record 30 set in 2009.

Ovenbirds set a new record (18).

Northern Waterthrush (66) approached the record of 86 set in 1998.

Buntings, Sparrows, Horned Lark:

Rose-breasted Grosbeak hit a near high (38), third only to 41 in 2009, and 51 in 2010.

The following sparrows hit record highs in 2013: **Vesper Sparrow** (268), **Savannah Sparrow** (970), **Lark Sparrow** (6), **Lark Bunting** (5), and **Swamp Sparrow** (5).

Clay-Colored Sparrow was recorded in near record numbers (1318), the record of 1410 having been set in 2010.

Lincoln's Sparrow was relatively high at 125, exceeded only by the record of 136 set in 2009.

Horned Lark (14) hit a relatively low number compared with recent years, in the low-double-digit range not seen since 2000-2002.

Blackbirds:

A modest number of **Western Meadowlarks** (147) maintains a drop-off since its 2006 high of 322.

Finches:

Crossbills are not seen regularly in the Calgary May count, but **Red Crossbills** hit a relatively high number in 2013 (28); the record is 35 (2002).

Pine Siskins hit a high number (1049).

American Goldfinches, always erratic, were present in low numbers (43) compared to the previous 10 years, in accord with their modest numbers prior to 1998.

Evening Grosbeak was recorded in record numbers (61); they rose in abundance in 2009 and have exceeded 50 individuals since 2011. While the numbers remain relatively small, their positive change seems to be real. It is heavily influenced by Priddis area (Area 23) and to a lesser extent by nearby Brown Lowry conservation area (Area 24), both areas having been counted by the same experienced observers before and following the jump in numbers.

Participants and some Comments, by Area

City of Calgary

Area 1: FCPP: 37 Street to Bridge 6 (W end of Fish Creek Provincial Park) : Not covered in 2013

Area 2: FCPP Bridge 6 East to Macleod Trail (Votier's Flats)

Participants: Gus Yaki, Marie-Paule Caron Daze; Brenda Cherrington; Trevor Churchill; Marie Coultis; Yvonne Klaver; Sue Konopnicki; Joe Novecosky; Rose Painter; Aileen Pelzer; John Stegeman; David Vernon; Wayne Walker, Marje Wing, Bernie Diebolt, and others.

Area 3, FCPP Macleod Trail to Bridge 13 (Glennfield): covered for the first time in many years.

Participants: Deanna Downton-Jullyan, Anne Belton, Helen Hebb, Jennifer Hilborne

Area 4: FCPP Burnsmead/Hull's Wood to Lafarge Meadows

Participants: Dan Arndt

Area 5: FCPP Mallard Point to Burnsmead

Participants: Jim St. Laurent, Joy Eli, Brenda Hurst, Jennifer Spencer, and Rebekah Sayers

Area 6: Carburn Park to Beaverdam Flats

Participants: Wayne & Joan Walker, Lorrie & John Anderson, Marje Wing, Peter Comfort

Comments: May 26: Beautiful day; birds active all day

Area 7: Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Pearce Estate Park

Participants: Dan Arndt, Bob Lefebvre, Sue Konopnicki, Rose Painter, Lynn Wilsack, with contributions from Bob Storms (Blue-Headed Vireo and Rose-breasted Grosbeak) and the Inglewood Bird-Banding Society thanks to Doug Collister and Michelle Dagg

Area 8: Glenmore Reservoir, Park and Weaselhead

Participants: Bob Lefebvre, Dan Arndt, David Vallance, Anand Singh, Paul Turbitt, Linda Kelly, Leanne Dalderis, Louise Bennet, Graeme Bennet, Lise Guha-Thakurta, Rose Painter (all Weaselhead & North Glenmore); Bernie Debolt +6 others in South Glenmore

Area 9: Bowness Park, Baker Park, Al Azhar, Tuscany Pond, to Bearspaw Dam

Participants: Gary Malcolm and others

Area 10: Bowmont Natural Area

Participants: Mike Bentley, Darlene Johanneson, Tommy Thorsteinsson (May 25), Kingsley Blades, Marian Swatschina, Wayne Walker, Gus Yaki (May 26); Olive-sided Flycatcher was reported by Jeremy Quickfall on AlbertaBird

Area 11: Lowery Gardens/Edworthy Park

Participants: Ena Spalding, John Bargman

Area 41: Griffith Woods

Participants: Tony Timmons, Howard Heffler

Area 42: Southeast Calgary – East of Bow River, Shepard, Ralph Klein Park.

Participants: Mike Mulligan, Sandy Ayer, and Sid Andrews, Laura Ewtushik, Aaron Alford from Ralph Klein Park.

Area 43: Areas of Calgary: areas not assigned (noteworthy sightings by individuals)

Contributors: Hank Vanderpol and Amy Darling reported from Confederation Park, NW Calgary; Terry Poulton and Amy Darling from Confluence Park in N Central Calgary; Lane Robson reported 1 Ruby-throated Hummingbird from Discovery Rise, SW Calgary; Terry Poulton confirmed the University of Calgary nesting pair of Peregrine Falcons.

Foothills Areas, West of Calgary: Eastern edge of this area is Prairie habitat, locally developed.

Area 12: Springbank Area

Participants: Ena Spalding, John Bargman

Comments: Lots of raptors.

Area 14: Water Valley North

Participants: Brian Elder and Ray Woods (north main part), Jamey Podlubny and Terry Poulton (SW part)

Area 15: Water Valley South

Participants: Andrew Slater

Area 16: Cochrane

Participants: Frank Hennessey, Rich and Lynn Moore; the Rose-breasted Grosbeak was reported by Sally Quon on AlbertaBird.

Area 17: Bow Valley PP and Exshaw

Participants: Tim Allison and Mark Rubensohn

Area 18: Kananaskis Country: Highway 40 Corridor & Mt. Lorette

Participants: Tim Allison, Amy Darling, and Bill Wilson from Mt. Lorette count

Comments: Fairly slow day (comment echoed by others in the Foothills area); but 21 Red-throated Loons!

Area 19: Sibbald Flats, Trail

Participants: Phillip Cram, Michael Bentley, Darlene Johannesson, Tommy Thorsteinsson

Area 20: Elbow River Basin

Participants: Lenora & Dick Flynn, Jerry Pilny

Area 21: Gorge Creek Road

Participants: Linda Bailey, Colin Young

Comments: Adult Black Bear appeared out of the forest 100m ahead and between us and destination of Link Meadows, debated as it finally ambles off, proceeded with noise and spray at the ready (last year they reported large Grizzly Bear tracks).

Area 22: Millarville/Threepoint Creek Area

Participant: Terry Korolyk

Comments: Some birds either very late arriving this year, or, there are some drastic changes. No Snipe for instance whereas the species is usually abundant here. Same for Meadowlarks. Grassland areas looked very dry. No Yellow Warblers or White-crowned Sparrows, which in recent years usually have good numbers.

Area 23: Priddis Area

Participants: Gus Yaki; Anne Elliott; Wayne McGonicle; Aileen Pelzer; Nimali Seneviratne; Monica Thomas; David Vernon

Area 24: Brown/Lowery Provincial Park

Participant: Colin Young, Linda Bailey

Area 25: South of Calgary

Participant: Terry Korolyk

Comments: Numbers of some deciduous woodland species and grassland species probably up slightly as I was able to do more of the Territory this year. Orioles seemed in higher than average numbers. A very large Cliff Swallow colony had no birds on Count day; don't know if the birds were late or if colony has been abandoned.

Area 26: Upper (North) Sheep River Basin

Participant: Mike Harrison, Mike Smith

Area 27: Southside, Sheep River Basin

Participants: Colin Young, Linda Bailey

Comment: foliage sparse (eastern sections), negligible (western), waterfowl markedly diminished

Area 28: Highwood River Basin west of Longview

Participant: Bob Lefebvre

Area 29: Central Highwood River Basin

Participant: Robert Worona; the Blackpoll and Orange-crowned Warblers and Hermit Thrush were reported from High River on AlbertaBird by Peter Maksymiw; the Semipalmated Plover was reported from west of High River by Bridget McEwan on eBird.

Comment: Very few passerine migrants; almost no gulls

Prairie Areas**Area 13: Didsbury**

Participants: Bernie Diebolt, Jan Simonson

Area 30: Didsbury East Bluebird Trail

Participant: Don Stiles, with contributions from Jean Dunn

Comments: Number of species ... is about average, many similar in numbers to last year. Franklin's Gull and Horned Lark not seen in large numbers for years; Missing Brown-headed Cowbird, regularly seen; low numbers of Vesper Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow, couldn't hear due to wind; Mountain Bluebirds up to 23 nests from last year's 21.

Area 31: Irricana

Participants: Kingsley Blades, with an additional report of an American Bittern on AlbertaBird by Doug McQueen.

Area 32: Strathmore North

Participants: David Pugh

Area 33: East of Calgary, Weed Lake to Bruce Lake to McDonald Lake

Participants: Ken and Chris Havard

Area 34: Carseland/Dalmead/Langdon Reservoir

Participants: Tony Timmons, Al Borgardt, Howard and Lyn Heffler; White-rumped Sandpiper from Bob Storms

Area 35: South of Strathmore

Participants: Lenora & Dick Flynn (full day), Jerry Pilny & Nimali Seneviratne (half day)

Area 36: Frank Lake and High River East

Participants: Bruce Barnetson, Dave Gibson, Ian Halladay, Don Magnusson, Greg Wagner, Jerry Pilny, Joan and Malcolm MacDonald. The bobolink was reported on AlbertaBird by Peter Maksymiw; a count-week Lark Bunting photo provided by Russ Amy. An unknown number (recorded here as 1) of Pectoral Sandpipers was reported for May 26, from Frank Lake, by Gerald Romanchuk and Steve Knight on eBird.

Comment: "We suspect the shorebirds left in the preceding clear night(s)".

Area 37: Acme/Carbon

Participants: Pat Mitchell, Jean Dunn

Comment: frogs singing everywhere after the previous rains

Area 38: Mckinnon Flats: not counted in 2013.

Area 40: West of Airdrie

Participants: Jim Foley, Jack Blair, Jim St Laurent