



Snow geese breed north of the timberline in Canada and Alaska, and they flock to central Kansas in the winter. There were 65,498 at Cheyenne Bottoms in December.

**Cheyenne Bottoms  
 Christmas Bird  
 Count**

- Number of species: 95  
 Greater white-fronted goose 30,458  
 Snow goose 65,498  
 Ross's goose 4  
 Cackling goose 733  
 Canada goose 19,178  
 Wood duck 5  
 Gadwall 7  
 American wigeon 5  
 Mallard 3889  
 Blue-winged teal 1  
 Northern shoveler 137  
 Northern pintail 1,244  
 Green-winged teal 141  
 Redhead 9  
 Ring-necked duck 10  
 Long-tailed duck 1  
 Bufflehead 2  
 Common goldeneye 102  
 Hooded merganser 14  
 Common merganser 107  
 Ruddy duck 13  
 Northern bobwhite 1  
 Ring-necked pheasant 25  
 Greater prairie-chicken 3  
 Wild turkey 21  
 Pied-billed grebe 1  
 American white pelican 2  
 Double-crested cormorant 7  
 Great blue heron 123  
 Black-crowned night-heron 3  
 Bald eagle 54  
 Northern harrier 147  
 Sharp-shinned hawk 2  
 Cooper's hawk 4  
 Red-tailed hawk 66  
 Red-tailed hawk (Harlan's) 1  
 Ferruginous hawk 1  
 Rough-legged hawk 1  
 American kestrel 21  
 Merlin 2  
 Prairie falcon 1  
 Wilson's snipe 5  
 Ring-billed gull 116  
 Herring gull 24  
 Rock pigeon 39  
 Eurasian collared-dove 5  
 Barn owl 4  
 Eastern screech-owl 2  
 Great horned owl 6  
 Short-eared owl 1  
 Belted kingfisher 5  
 Red-bellied woodpecker 11  
 Yellow-bellied sapsucker 1  
 Downy woodpecker 18  
 Hairy woodpecker 2  
 Northern flicker 27  
 Northern flicker (yellow-shafted) 7  
 Northern flicker (red-shafted) 6  
 Loggerhead shrike 1  
 Blue jay 5  
 American crow 7  
 Horned lark 71  
 Black-capped chickadee 4  
 Red-breasted nuthatch 4  
 White-breasted nuthatch 11  
 Carolina wren 1  
 Winter wren 5  
 Marsh wren 5  
 Golden-crowned kinglet 5  
 Ruby-crowned kinglet 1  
 Eastern bluebird 18  
 Hermit thrush 2  
 American robin 75  
 European starling 1840  
 American pipit 1  
 Cedar waxwing 61  
 Orange-crowned warbler 1  
 Yellow-rumped warbler (myrtle) 10  
 Spotted towhee 1  
 American tree sparrow 453  
 Field sparrow 1  
 Song sparrow 13  
 Harris's sparrow 61  
 White-crowned sparrow 3  
 Dark-eyed junco 134  
 Dark-eyed junco (slate-colored) 2  
 Dark-eyed junco (Oregon) 2  
 Lapland longspur 552  
 Northern cardinal 14  
 Red-winged blackbird 2,905,694  
 Eastern meadowlark 20  
 Western meadowlark 84  
 Meadowlark sp. 136  
 Brewer's blackbird 2  
 Common grackle 132  
 Great-tailed grackle 310  
 Brown-headed cowbird 4  
 Purple finch 3  
 House finch 36  
 American goldfinch 33  
 House sparrow 136

# This is for the birds

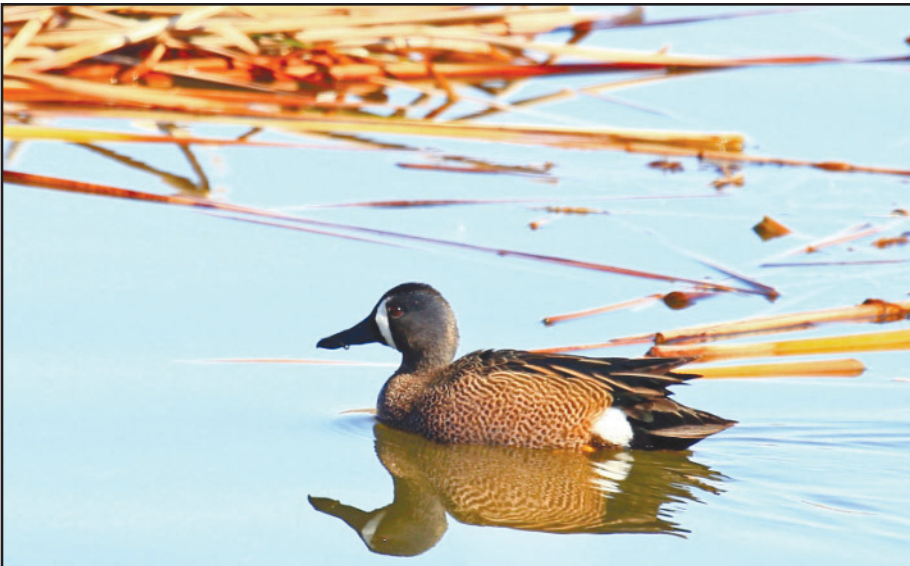
Cheyenne Bottoms Christmas Bird Count shows numbers are up



Ducks like this male and female are a common sight at wetlands. Nearly 4,000 were counted at the Bottoms.



Three black-crowned night herons were spotted this year at Cheyenne Bottoms during the Christmas Bird Count. These birds hunt mainly at night or early morning, and eat fish, crustaceans, frogs, insects and mammals. During the day, they rest in trees or bushes.



Shown is a blue-winged teal. Only one was spotted at Cheyenne Bottoms during the annual Christmas Bird Count.

**C**HEYENNE BOTTOMS — The annual National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count was held in December, and the results showed that the 95 species of birds were present at Cheyenne Bottoms this winter. The numbers were up.

“This year’s bird count was better than most years,” said Robert Penner, Cheyenne Bottoms and Avian Program manager for The Nature Conservancy. “The high count is reflective of a mild winter. We were happy with the number of different species.”

A group of 15 people spent eight hours counting the birds at the Bottoms, and it included both state and Kansas Wetlands Education Center employees as well as a few volunteers.

There were a few surprises, too. The long tailed duck, which is more common to the arctic and northern U.S., was spotted. Although the duck feeds close to the surface of the water, it is capable of diving up to 200 feet, a skill which is unnecessary at Cheyenne Bottoms.

Two other unusual birds for this area were the orange crowned warbler and the black crowned night heron.

There are many purposes for the bird count, according to Penner. The information will go into a database that is available to biologists who look at trends. The count is done at roughly the same time and place each year.

The third bird counts at Cheyenne Bottoms were done in the mid-60s, although the first count in Barton County began in 1958 by Frank Robl.

“Forty percent of all bird species are in decline in the U.S.,” said Penner. For example, “the sparrows are declining in population,” due to continued loss of habitat.

Penner records the information from the counts into graphs, and there is some good news. There is a positive trend for red tailed hawks. Five were counted in 1967, and 67 were counted in 2010 at the Bottoms.

In addition, the bald eagles are increasing in some grasslands, said Penner.

Birds were once regarded as prey only and their importance in the biological web was unknown. Prior to the turn of the 20th Century, people participated in a tradition known as the Christmas “Side Hunt.” They would choose sides and go hunting; whoever brought in the biggest pile of birds won.

Conservation began around the turn of the 20th century, as scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an officer in the new conservation-oriented Audubon Society, proposed a new tradition, “Christmas Bird Census,” that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

Chapman and 27 birders held 25 Christmas Bird Counts that day in locations ranging from Toronto, Ontario, to Pacific Grove, Calif., with most counts in or near the cities of the northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters counted around 90 species combined.

The data collected over the past century has allowed biologists to study the long-term health of bird populations from North America. When combined with other surveys, it provides a picture of how the continent’s bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

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