

Rare birds a surprise

The Montague Christmas Bird Count again produced the greatest number of species with 42, but the National Park Count (36 species) and the Hillsborough Count (38 species) revealed some rarer birds that surprised the intrepid observers of the day.

Starting with the National Park Count on December 23, birders were gratified to find 2 Gannets and a Northern Shrike, as well as a Surf Scoter. The best of treats was a Ruddy Turnstone that has been wintering near the Maritime Electric Plant in Charlottetown, and highlighted the Hillsborough Count. Two Common Loons were among the best sightings on the Montague Count.

All counts turned up some late migrants such as Great Blue Herons, Northern Flickers, Song Sparrows and Grackles. The best publicized of these out-of-sync birds was an American Robin that made the CBC National News on December 27, both on evening and late night reports.

A few birds were recorded on only one of the three counts, for example Gray Jay, Belted Kingfisher, and Glaucous Gull, but all counts had the usual smattering of winter residents such as Blue Jays, Crows and Black-Capped Chickadees. The largest congregations were of European Starlings at Hillsborough Bridge, Snow Buntings at Earncliffe, Black Ducks off the National Park, and Oldsquaw and Red-Breasted Mergansers in St. Mary's and Cardigan Bays respectively.

If there was one striking similarity in all the counts it was the absence of hawks, falcons and buteos. Two unidentified hawks showed up on the National Park Count, and a possible (disputed) Osprey was found on the Hillsborough Count, but the usual representation of Kestrels, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks and Goshawks didn't materialize. Raptor watchers had to settle for Bald Eagles only!

Results are shown below in a manner to allow you to make your own comparisons.

	P.E.I. National Park, Dec. 20/86	Hillsborough Dec. 27/86	Montague Jan. 3/87
Common Loon	-	-	2
Northern Gannet	2	-	-
Great Cormorant	-	-	4
Double-Crested Cormorant	-	-	4
Cormorant Spp.	-	1	-
Great Blue Heron	2	1	-
Canada Goose	6	-	25
Snow Goose	-	-	1
Mallard	-	-	11
Black Duck	423	217	292
Common Goldeneye	150	169	356