

WOW – Another Great Year for Mesilla Valley Audubon Society!

There were many interesting aspects to this year's Las Cruces Christmas Bird Count. This was National Audubon Society's 110th Count Year and our 33rd. Despite tying a record for the most participants and the 2nd highest amount of effort, we had lower than average numbers for many species; mostly sparrows, a phenomenon that's being seen across the desert southwest on CBC's from California to Texas. On the bright side, we counted a record high number of species for our count, 131 species! We had a record high count for wintering Anna's Hummingbirds with 8 counted and only our 2nd year with a Broad-tailed Hummingbird counted. This was also only the 2nd year for Black-necked Stilts on the count – last year was the first – they have been overwintering further north along the Rio Grande in the last few years around Sunland Park, NM. We added two new species to our checklist: White-tailed Kite and Orange Bishop! The White-tailed Kite is a species that has been expanding its range in New Mexico during the last few years and was a known local breeder in 2009. The one seen on Count Day was seen previously and was watched for a week or two, where it had been hunting in agricultural areas in the north valley. The Orange Bishop is kept as a cage bird in some parts of the U.S., with a natural distribution in sub-Saharan Africa. It has become established as a breeding bird in areas of southern California and Phoenix, Arizona and has shown up in places such as Oklahoma, and even Chicago. The origin of the bird in Las Cruces is unknown, but it has been seen in the same yard in the valley since early November 2009 and comes to a seed feeder with House Finches and House Sparrows. The bird had no outward signs of being an escaped cage bird such as a leg band, worn feathers, etc. It also forages on its own away from the yard. This is the first record of this species in southern New Mexico. The bird is an adult male and prior to the count had brilliant orange and black plumage that by count day had turned a streaky drab brown, making the identification of the bird very difficult to a new observer, but it was readily detected by the homeowner.

High counts were made or equaled for “Blue” Snow Goose (1), Cooper’s Hawk (30), Forster’s Tern (4), Great Horned Owl (6), White-throated Swift (494), Anna’s Hummingbird (8), Broad-tailed Hummingbird (1), Yellow-billed Sapsucker (1), Say’s Phoebe (89), Hutton’s Vireo (4), Western Scrub-Jay (107), Golden-crowned Kinglet (2), and Olive Warbler (1). Some of the rarer or hard-to-find species where only 1 of each was counted, included “Blue” Snow Goose, Ruddy Duck, Cattle Egret, White-tailed Kite, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Cassin’s Vireo, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Olive warbler, Yellow-rumped “Myrtle” Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Black-chinned Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and the Orange Bishop.

Regular “common” species we missed on Count Day included American Wigeon, Long-billed Dowitcher, Ring-billed Gull, Red-naped Sapsucker, Common Raven, Horned Lark, Canyon Wren, Chestnut-collared Longspur and eastern Meadowlark. Apparent continued declines for 2 of our local breeding species that are declining throughout their range were Loggerhead Shrike (17 counted) and Black-throated Sparrow (163 counted). The local decline of these species is likely a direct result of loss of habitat due to continued development of desert scrublands on the east side of Las Cruces (within the count circle). Approximately 25% of former breeding habitat for these 2 species has been removed or altered and is no longer available to them (see page 3 for graphs of our Las Cruces historical CBC data).

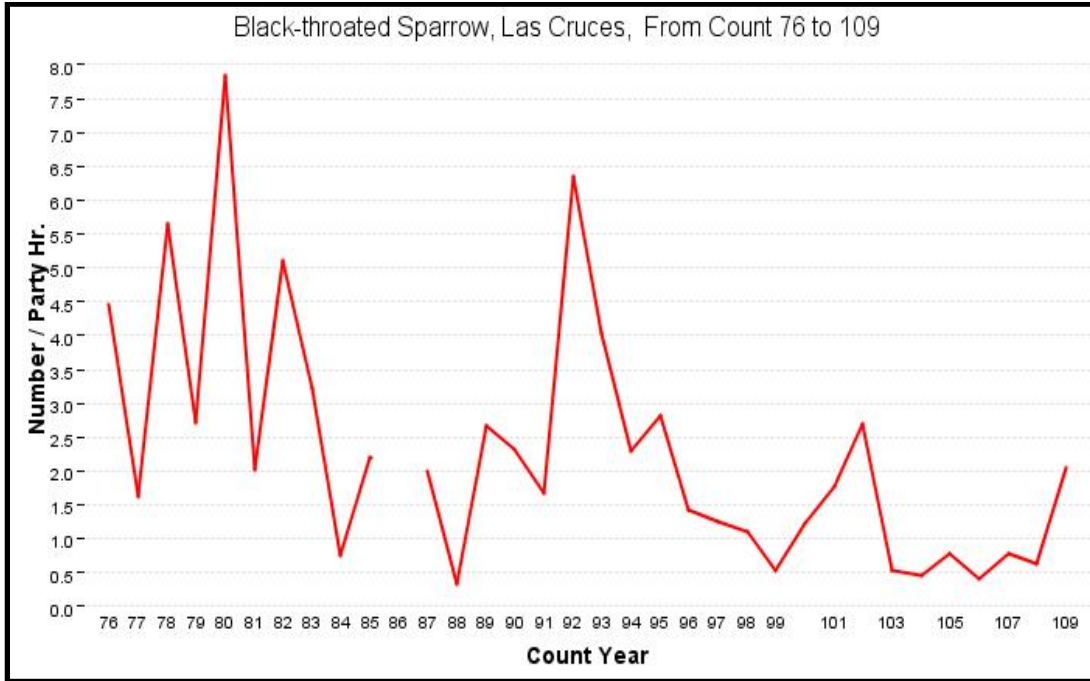
The Christmas Bird Count is not only a fun birding event and a chance to meet people, but has real scientific value from the data collected by us “citizen scientists.” The data from the CBCs can be analyzed to determine long-term trends of wintering bird populations, define the distribution of species during and between years, and in conjunction with the U.S. Geological Survey’s Breeding Bird Surveys can be used to track trends of species of concern like Brewer’s Sparrows and Eastern and Western Meadowlarks through the breeding and wintering seasons, as well as tracking the advancing range changes across North America of non-native species such as Eurasian Collared-dove (see below!).

I hope you all had fun and enjoyed the event. We had an extremely age-diverse group of participants ranging from 5 years old to 80-somethings! And I know that Mesilla valley Audubon Society also recruited some new members following the count. A list of all participants is included at the end of this report. THANKS AGAIN!

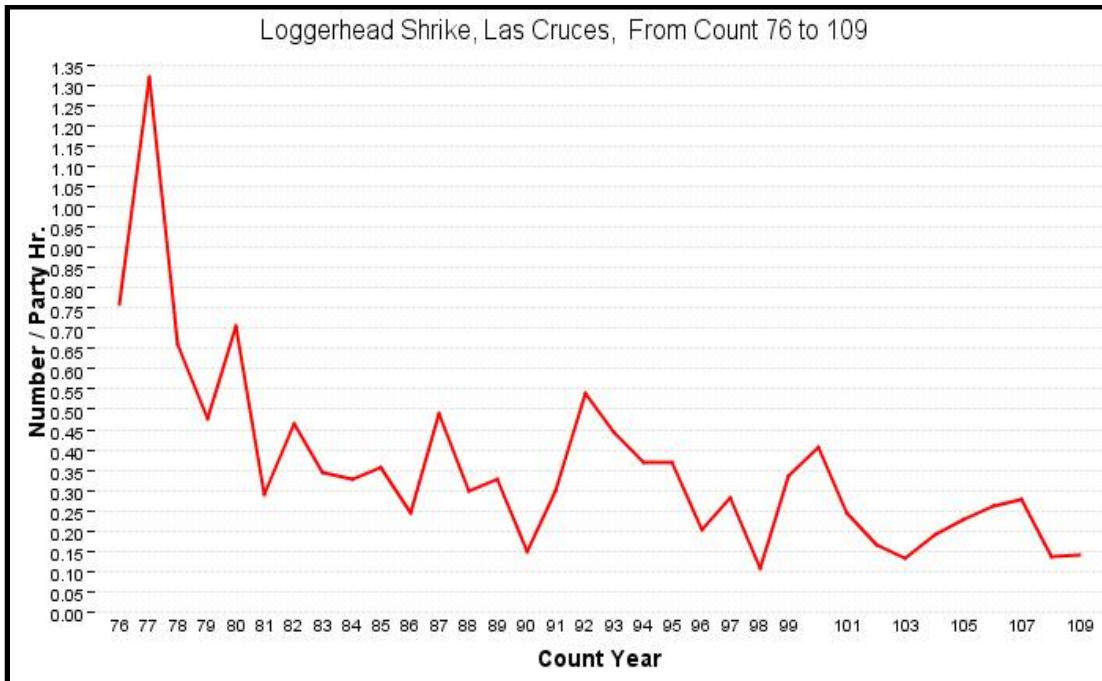
David Griffin, President
Mesilla Valley Audubon Society

Some examples of the use of local CBC data: (note: X axis is the CBC year & the Y axis is # of birds per party hour – an index of birds per unit effort)

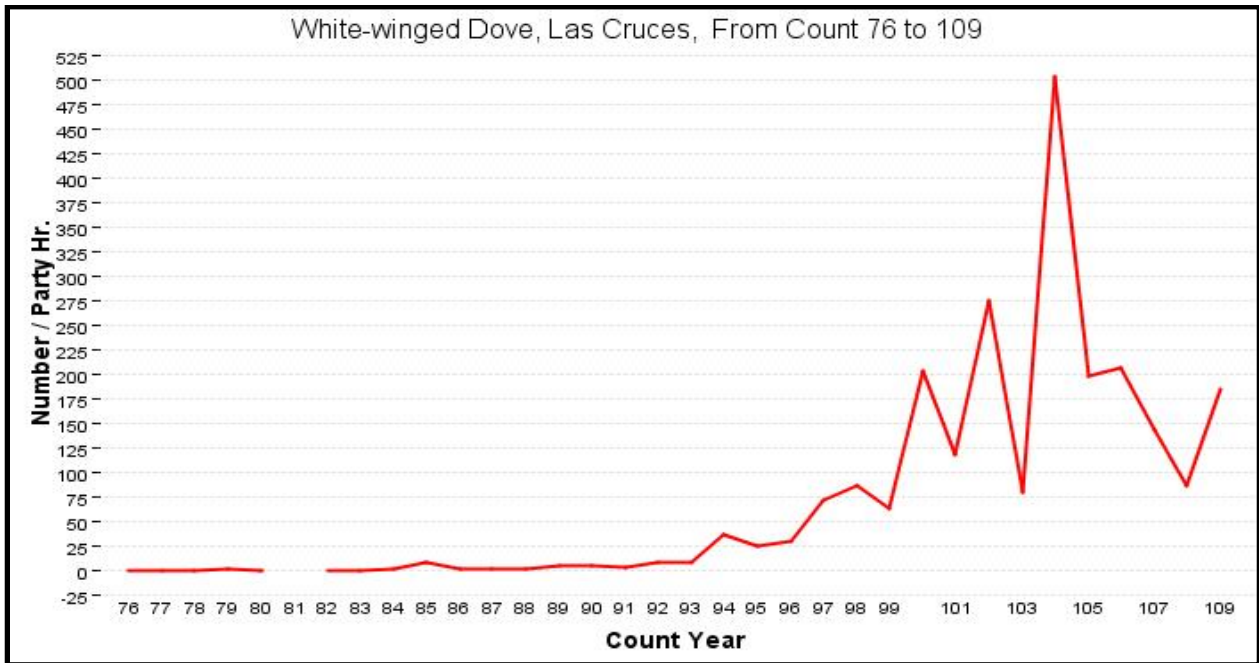
1. Showing the general decline of BTSP numbers in Las Cruces from 1977 to 2008:



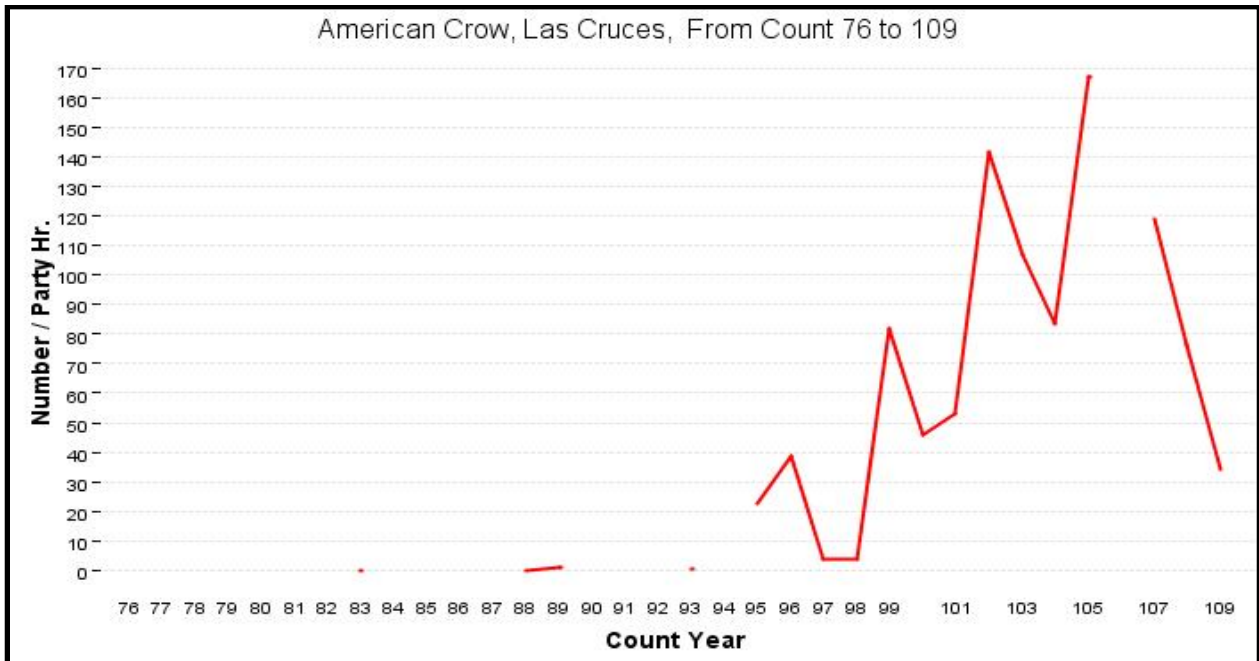
2. Showing the general decline of LOSH numbers in Las Cruces from 1977 to 2008:



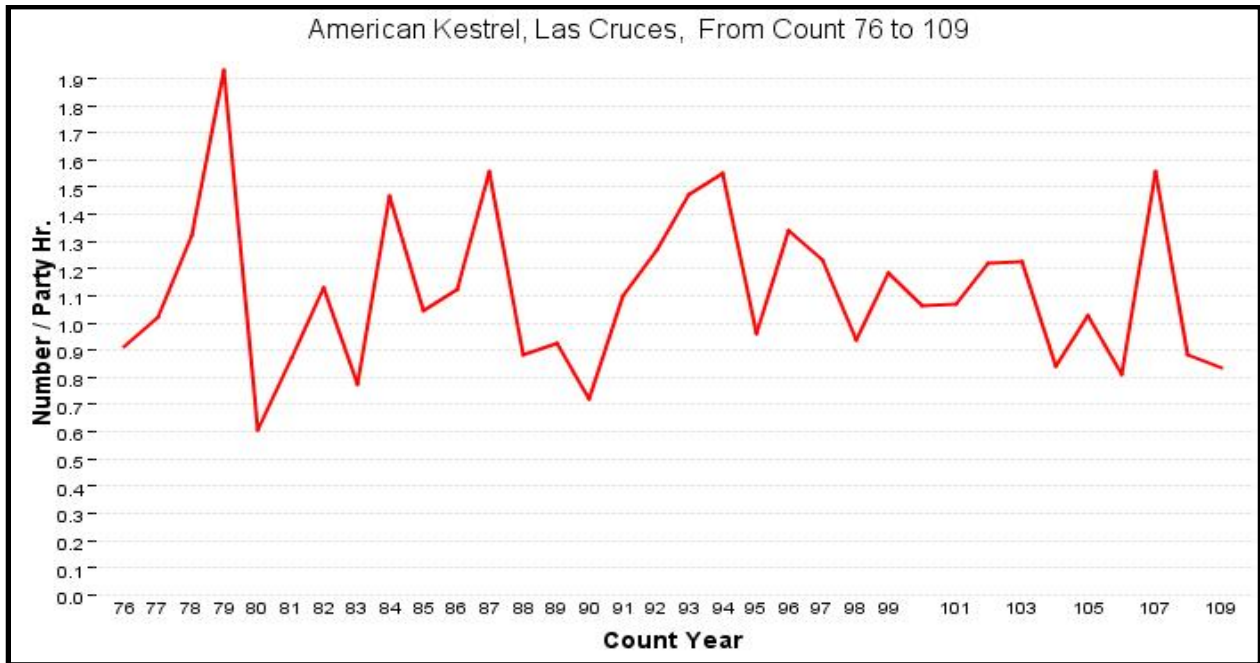
- Showing general increase in numbers of WWDO in Las Cruces from 1977 to 2008 (likely due to increased acreage in pecan farms and maturation of exiting pecan groves):



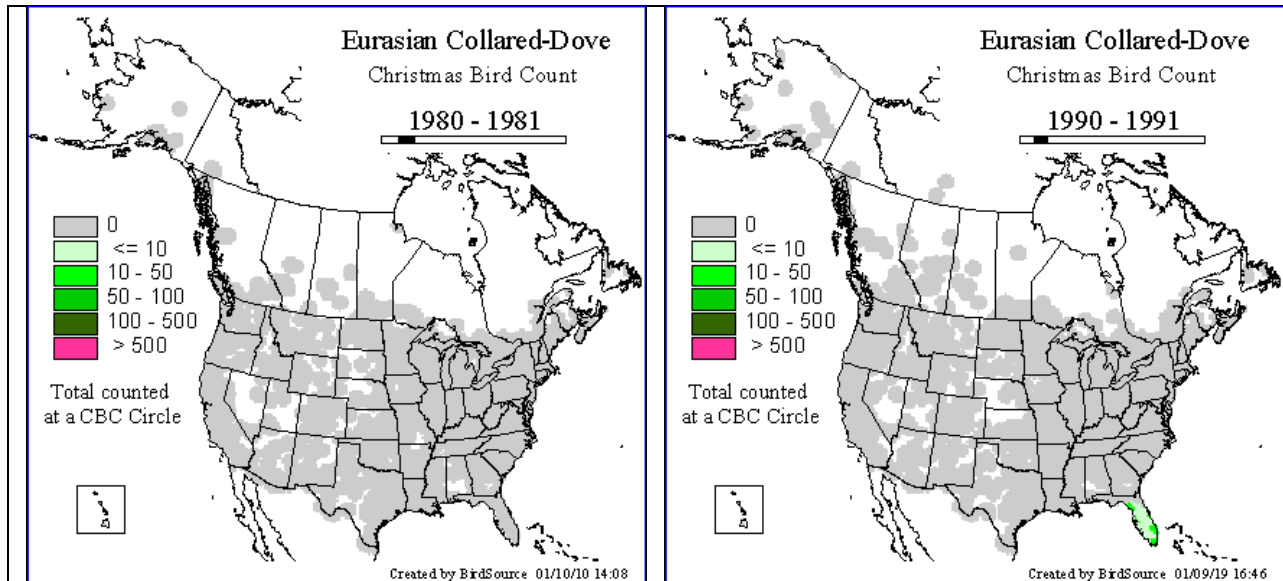
- Showing general increase in numbers of AMCR in Las Cruces from 1977 to 2008 (likely due to increased acreage in pecan farms and maturation of exiting pecan groves):

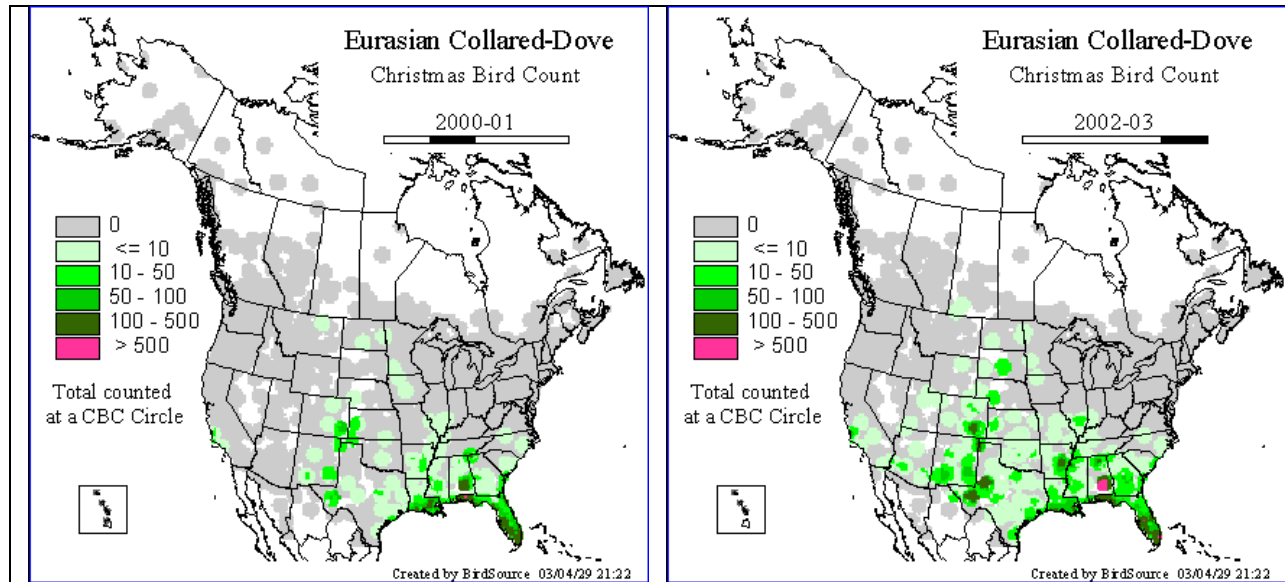


5. Showing stable, but fluctuating trend of AMKE in Las Cruces from 1977 to 2008 (note fluctuations are likely a result of increases or decreases of prey animals based on late summer rainfall):



6. Spread of Eurasian Collared-dove in North America 1980 (not present) to 2003 (note: 4 Maps; as of 2009 ECDO have reached as far northwest as southeastern Alaska!):





THANKS TO ALL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE COUNT!

- Ferne Allan
- Pamela Angell
- Beth Bardwell
- Sean Barham
- Bruce Begin
- Nancy Begin
- Ray Bowers
- Carol Campbell
- Jim Campbell
- Rick Castetter
- Iris De La O
- Ian Dolly
- John Douglas
- Linda Douglas
- Martha Dozier
- Valerie Endruweit
- Will Endruweit
- Bruce Ernst
- Moirra Ernst
- Gordon Ewing
- Steven Ewing
- C J Goin
- David Griffin
- Trish Griffin
- Maya Gupta
- Susannah Skyer Gupta

Harold Harrison
Sue Hill
Wally Hill
Kathryn Hovey
John Hyndman
Alan Krueger
Tim Lawton
Judy Lazarus Yellon
Joy McFarland
Tim McKimmie
Kate McLane
Mike McLane
Jennifer Montoya
Woodrow Montoya
Beth O'Leary
Mark Pendleton
Guy Powers
Ralph Preszler
Minerva Rivera
Barbara Rodriguez
Mirande Roussel
Lorraine Schulte
Donna Simonetti
David Smith
Gill Sorg
Ken Stinnett
Nancy Stotz
Kevin Suter
Wayne Treers
Al Trompler
Ken Ward
Sue Ward
Walter Whitford
Fred Yellon