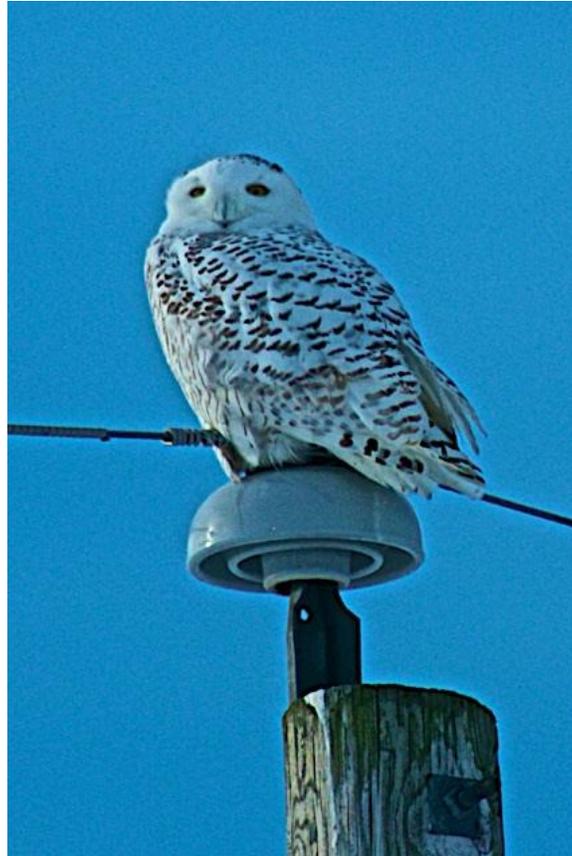


**NOVEMBER 15-30, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW**  
**By Dick Harlow**

My Natural History Notes are compiled twice a month, one in the middle of the month covering the first two weeks of the month and the other at the end of the month on the 30<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup> of the month. I've decided to write about the Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, which begin this year on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> of December and end the first weekend of January 2015. This will give people time to think about how they could contribute if they so desire. Believe it or not there is NO fee involved, just your vision and a desire to contribute to the science of collecting bird population data.



**Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*** Photo © Dick Harlow

Simply said, Christmas Bird Counts are a time when people interested in bird watching, experienced and inexperienced alike, get together to find as many different bird species and their number, in a specific area as can be found in a twenty-four hour period. Think of it as a 24-hour citizen science project in bird finding. When this is done over many years, the data become a valuable source of information about bird populations, how climate change affects bird populations, how human development effects bird populations, and the changes that occur over time, etc. Besides all the great data that are collected, the day is a fun time and usually ends with a potluck supper as a social get together with people who have like interests. If someone doesn't have the time to be outside for a day, then he/she may want to contribute by simply watching backyard bird feeders and reporting how many species they see over a specified period of time. This is a contribution to that specific bird count in

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that specific area. All this information is valuable and contributes to the huge database for that particular year.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (<http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>) has been going on for 114 years. You can imagine the data contribution by thousands of volunteers identifying the many species of birds throughout North America, Central America, South America and Hawaii. The information has been a real boon to identifying bird population problems associated with climate change.

Let's say you know of an area that is a good birding area in winter and you would like to make it part of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Your area will need to meet 3 requirements in order to be part of the National Audubon Christmas Count. The first requirement is to draw a circle that is 15 miles in diameter. The second requirement is that your circle must not overlap with any other 15-mile registered Christmas Count circle. The third requirement is to submit your circle to the National Audubon for acceptance. The 15-mile diameter circle represents the count circle that you and your team will focus on for 24 hours. As the lead person for this circle, you are known as the Compiler for the count, and will divide the circle into smaller subsections. Each subsection will have a leader and he/she will manage each subsection with a team of volunteer observers. These small parties of individuals will count and record all the species observed and the number of each species throughout the day for each section. Along with these parties in each section, there are Bird Feeder watchers who keep track of what they see at their bird feeders throughout the day or during specific times during the day. At the end of the day all the data are phoned or handed in to the Compiler or head of the count circle. In our area we have the Middlebury Count run by James Andrews, the Ferrisburg Count run by Mike Winslow and the Rutland Count run by Roy Pilcher. I have been involved in Christmas Bird Counts since 1964 and was the Compiler for the Buzzards Bay Christmas Bird Count in Massachusetts from 1964 to 2002. I truly enjoyed the comradeship of the fellow birders on this day. This year will be my 50<sup>th</sup> year participating in the Audubon Christmas Bird Counts.

In December 2013-January 2014, the Christmas Bird Count was noted for the number of Snowy Owls that were observed throughout the country, specifically the lower 48. Snowy Owls are an Arctic owl. They feed on rodents, such as lemmings and mice, hares, birds, ducks or whatever they can find in the arctic environment. However, one of their chief foods is a lemming, a small rodent, halfway in size between a mouse and a hamster. Lemmings go through cycles of drastic population increases followed by population crashes. During a good year when lemmings are plentiful, Snowy Owls will lay more eggs and produce a greater number of fledged young who will then have to survive on their own. This population increase in owls along with the difficulty in finding lemmings under the snow causes the owls to disperse and move south. This is believed to be what happened last year with the large numbers of Snowy Owls reported throughout the United States.

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**Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*** Photo © Dick Harlow

Here in Vermont and especially Addison County, we had the good fortune of having Snowy Owl numbers that exceeded past years' reports. This called for more specific data that needed to be collected. Consequently, in February, many birders gathered in Addison County to do what was called a Snowy Owl blitz, counting as many Snowy Owls throughout Addison County in 24 hours. Addison County was divided into sections, individuals picked the section they would cover. Adjacent blocks of areas were detailed so it would lessen the chance of duplication by each team and the fun began! I was able to photograph 16 different Snowy Owls throughout our section, and we saw several more. The Blitz recorded a total of 123 observations for a total of at least 24 different owls. When seeing one Snowy Owl in a winter is considered a treat, seeing more than one and exceeding 20 in a county is just pure joy! It will be very interesting to see whether there will be a return of many Snowy Owls this winter.

EastView is in an area that is in the Middlebury Christmas Bird Count circle, but has not been birded as intensely as it could be. Therefore, we have the opportunity to help collect bird sightings on Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> of December, the date of the Middlebury Count. If you want to participate by watching your bird feeder just let me know (Dick Harlow) so that I can tell the compiler what you observed. If you want to participate for a day, check with the compiler of each area previously mentioned.

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There is an interesting article concerning human population growth and how it will effect bird species, bird population distribution and extinction at the link below. Of course I don't expect that I will be around then, but my grandkids will be.

**ScienceDaily**<sup>®</sup> [Who will come to your bird feeder in 2075?](#)  
Your source for the latest research news



**Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*** Photo © Dick Harlow

**Interesting observation: A Snowy Owl was observed, 11/28/14, on an electrical pole, at the far end of South Street Extension opposite EastView cottages.**

### MAMMAL SIGHTINGS FOR NOVEMBER

- Muskrat
- Eastern Cottontail
- Meadow Vole
- Deer Mouse
- Coyote - heard

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**Weather Tidbits for November 2014 at EastView**

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

**Measurements based on a 24hr clock for 30 days.**

**Precipitation: Includes rain and snowmelt.**

**Precipitation for November: 52.4 mm or 2.1 inches**

**Snowfall for November 2014: 307.4 mm 12.1 inches**

**Snow Days: 4**

**Highest wind: November 2, 39 MPH, Direction: North**

**Average Wind speed for November 2014: 4.4 MPH**

**Dominate November Wind Direction: North**

**Days w/wind above 20 MPH – 19**

**Days w/wind above 30 MPH - 4**

**November Overcast Days: 11**