

## Ron's Commentary on the 2020 Carden Challenge Results

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020 was a different format for the Carden Challenge, with participating teams doing 24-hour counts on their home turf, and team members often widely dispersed. Instead of 40 to 50 naturalists scouring the Carden circle, this year saw only a half-dozen "locals" on the ground in Carden. The weather in the Carden area was also decidedly sub-par, with temperatures in the low teens, and persistent showers dampening the activity of nearly all forms of wildlife.

As a result, the number of species seen within the Carden circle were down considerably. We have good comparative data from the past nine years, which shows both the numerical decline and the "big misses" – species that have been observed on most of the prior years, but not this year:

**Bird species: 124** this year, compared to a range of 142-157 in previous years.

Big Misses:	Pied-billed Grebe	Least Bittern	Blue-winged Teal
	Broad-winged Hawk	Loggerhead Shrike	Red-breasted Nuthatch
	Bank Swallow	Blackpoll Warbler	
	Vesper Sparrow	White-crowned Sparrow	

**Mammal species: 10** this year, compared to a range of 14-21 in previous years.

Big Misses: Beaver Red Fox White-tailed Deer

On the other hand: A new mammal species recorded in the 2020 Challenge: Meadow Vole

**Reptile species: 5** this year, compared to a range of 7-9 in previous years.

Big Misses: Blanding's Turtle Snapping Turtle

**Amphibian species: 7** this year, compared to a range of 6-12 in previous years.

Big Misses: American Bullfrog

**Odonate species (dragonflies/damselflies): 2** this year, compared to a range of 10-27 in prior years.

Big Misses: Eastern Forktail American Emerald Beaverpond Baskettail  
Dot-tailed Whiteface 4-spotted Skimmer

**Butterfly species: 2** this year, compared to a range of 16-22 in most previous years.

Big Misses: Almost everything!

Please note that these figures apply **only** to the Carden circle, and in no way reflect the enthusiasm and expertise of those lucky enough to spend their time there. The generally miserable weather conditions greatly affected the movement and visibility of many species, especially the flying insects. But we felt it was worthwhile to compile these results for consistency in record-keeping.

**On the broader front**, with many more participants spread across much of southern Ontario, the numbers look considerably better. In addition to the 124 Carden bird species, these teams racked up another **52 species of birds**, and one hybrid (Brewster's Warbler). In general terms, these included:

**Big-water birds:** such as Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Canvasback and Red-breasted Merganser.

**Wetland species:** such as Least Bittern, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, Great Egret, Sora and Common Moorhen.

**Southern species:** such as Black-crowned Night-Heron, Tufted Titmouse, Orchard Oriole, Northern Cardinal, Purple Martin, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Northern Mockingbird.

A few **shorebirds**, including Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs and Semipalmated Sandpiper.

**Raptors:** such as Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, and Peregrine Falcon.

**Two late warblers:** Blackpoll and Wilson's Warblers.

A few **northern species**, including Canada Jay, both Kinglet species, and White-crowned Sparrow.

**Mammals:** Teams across southern Ontario more than doubled the number of mammals observed, adding 15 species. Most notable among these were 5 species of bats identified by Toby Rowland in the Washago area: Little Brown Bat, Big Brown Bat, Hoary Bat, Silver-haired Bat, and Eastern Red Bat.

**Reptiles:** Observers beyond the Carden circle added 5 species of reptiles, including Blanding's Turtle, Snapping Turtle, and Redbellied, Smooth Green, and Northern Ring-necked Snakes.

**Amphibians:** Observers across southern Ontario added sightings of E. Redback Salamander, Pickerel Frog, Wood Frog, and American Bullfrog.

**Odonates:** 12 species added from places with perhaps more sunshine than Carden, including Ebony Jewelwing, Boreal Bluet, Eastern and Fragile Forktails, Dusky and Lancet Clubtails, Spiny and Beaverpond Baskettails, Dot-faced and Hudsonian Whitefaces, Common Whitetail, and 4-spotted and Chalk-fronted Skimmers.

**Butterflies:** 11 species added, including Cabbage and Mustard Whites, Northern Spring Azure, Silvery Blue, Monarch, Red Admiral, Eastern Comma, Dreamy Duskywing, Hobomok and Silver-spotted Skippers, and Gray Hairstreak.

Note: This summary is drawn from lists submitted by the 24 teams that took part in the 2020 Carden Challenge. In compiling this data, I may well have overlooked some observations or inadvertently committed errors. If you see an error in this summary of the Excel spreadsheet that tabulates species observed in the Carden circle, please let me know. And a bit thank-you to everyone who took part, submitted your results in a timely fashion, and together raised an incredible \$38,000 for conservation of the Carden Alvar. See you again next year!