

PARKSVILLE QUALICUM BEACH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

ESTIMATED DAILY BRANT COUNT REPORT - 2017

by the

ARROWSMITH NATURALISTS

for

THE NATURE TRUST OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Sandra Gray

Count Coordinator and Compiler

The **2017 Brant Primary Counts** covered the full length of the Parksville Qualicum Beach Wildlife Management Area (PQBWMA). Each of the nine primary counts took place between late February and early May over a 1–2.5 hour time period on the dates shown in **TABLE 1**. Observers met at a central location then divided into 1, 2 or 3 groups, each group with their assigned area to cover. All multiple group counts took place at the same time to avoid double counting. Counts were timed to catch the falling tide when food sources were left exposed on the beach or floating in shallow water.

In addition to the primary counts, **Incidental Counts**, as seen in **TABLE 2** were done by individuals or small groups of observers as they recorded Brant numbers during their visits to the PQBWMA shoreline January through early May. The incidental counts show the concentrations of Brant at specific locations. While most counts were approximately two hours in length, some counts were as short as fifteen minutes.

Count locations include the following named places which were also used in 2015, 2016 and in other historical Brant counts within the PQBWMA:

Area 1: Marshall Stevenson Unit of the Qualicum National Wildlife Area (MSWA), Little Qualicum River mouth, Surfside Drive West and East, Qualicum Beach viewing stand, Qualicum Beach, Judge's Row

Area 2: Seacrest Place, Butterball Drive, Eaglecrest Beach, Johnstone Rd, Admiral Tryon Blvd West and East, Admiral Tryon pool, Columbia Beach

Area 3: French Creek Marina, Parksville Community Park, Parksville Bay, Mariner Way, Englishman River mouth, Craig Bay, Rath Trevor Provincial Park, Brant Point

Total mileage of approximately 1164 km was accumulated by participating volunteers on the nine primary counts, including round trip from home. There was considerable additional mileage on incidental counts that was not recorded.

The thirteen 2017 Brant count volunteer observers were: Sandra Gray, Dan Gray, Elaine LeFebvre, Lynne Brookes, Dave Erickson, Dave Hutchings, Jane Towill, Jim Goodwin, Roger Simms, Larry Williams, Toni Wyckoff, Catherine Watson, Derrick Grimmer.

The total number of person-hours of observation was 180 hours.

Sandra Gray
July 5, 2017

TABLE 1 --- PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 1, 2, 3

Brant Count #1 -- Full length of PQBWMA

-February 28, 2017. 10:30 am - 11:40 am

-Estimated Count #1 daily total : 822 Brant

- Rath Trevor Beach -740. PV Com Park -51. Admiral Tryon East -22. Q B viewing stand -9.

-This is a typical count for early in the season when most of the Brant will be on the extensive sand flats of Rath Trevor Provincial Park in Craig Bay feeding at the tideline just before the lowest daytime tide. Brant were also seen in small groups flying, feeding in shallow water and floating 2 km offshore on the Strait of Georgia.

-Conditions: Mostly clear, water calm with good visibility, light wind, a falling 8-9' tide.

-8 counters: SG, LB, RS, JG, JT, DE, DH, EL

Brant Count # 2 – Full length of PQBWMA

-March 7, 2017. 2:15 pm - 3:45 pm

-Estimated Count #2 daily total: 308 Brant

-Rath Trevor – 0. Mariner Way – 94. PV Com. Park -12. Seacrest to Admiral Tryon W -75. Judge's Row to Seacroft –17. Surfside Drive West and East – 110.

-The herring spawn started in this area March 4 and continues. Many thousands of gulls and diving ducks, mostly scoters right now, have arrived and are feeding on herring along the full length of the PQBWMA. Hundreds of sea lions and harbour seals are also feasting at this time of plenty. Many Bald Eagles were seen from all viewing sites perched along the shoreline, hunting for herring and continually flushing the clouds of gulls and rafts of scoters. Fishing vessels were observed off the Little Qualicum River, Columbia Beach, French Creek marina, Parksville Bay, Englishman River and NW Bay. Very few Brant were seen today as the viewing conditions were poor due to choppy seas and strong winds. More Brant are suspected further out on the Strait of Georgia where they often ride out the worst weather.

-Conditions: Partly cloudy, choppy seas with white caps, 20 – 35km/h winds.

-7 counters: SG, LB, JT, JG, DE, DH, EL

Brant Count #3 – Full length of PQBWMA

-March 14, 2017. 10:40 am – 12:30 pm

-Estimated Count #3 daily total: 1749 Brant

-PV Com Park & PV Bay -223. Rath Trevor-120. Seacrest to Admiral Tryon -736. Mouth of Little Qualicum River to Surfside Drive East-670.

- A lively day along the shoreline of the PQBWMA today with clouds of thousands of gulls continually flying about then settling down to feed on herring roe. The Brant were mostly feeding amongst the gulls where a measure of protection was gained. The flocks of Brant were flushed many times by winds, eagles, gulls and TT seekers searching the logs above the high tide mark. So far this year, the number of dogs on the beach appears to be less than other years, proof that the dog restriction signage is working. Skye Ryan from CHEK News filmed and interviewed the Brant counters, aired on the evening news. <http://www.cheknews.ca/surprising-new-behaviour-seen-parksville-geese-288824/>

-Conditions: Partly cloudy skies, 10-20 km/hr winds, choppy seas at exposed sites, visibility was good today on the outgoing tide.

-8 Counters: SG, DG, LB, RS, JT, DE, DH, EL.

TABLE 1 --- PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 4, 5, 6

Brant Count #4 – Full length of PQBWMA

-March 21, 2017. 2:30 pm – 3:50 pm

-Estimated Count #4 daily total: 3739 Brant

-Rath Trevor- 950. PV Com Park-405. Admiral Tryon E&W-1365. Johnstone to Seacrest-379. QB viewing stand-550. Surfside Drive West and East-90.

-Brant numbers are up from last week. Small groups of Brant were moving short distances often. The shoreline was strewn with herring roe and piled up along the high tide line. We saw frenzied feeding at times with birds very close together. Gull numbers remain high with frequent flights of hundreds and sometimes thousands. Disturbances to feeding Brant were mostly due to gull movements.

-Conditions: Overcast, 10-15km/hr winds, seas a bit choppy but fair visibility.

-11 counters: SG, DG, LB, DE, DH, CW, EL, JG, RS, LW, visitor Sean Boyd of the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Brant Count #5 – Full length of PQBWMA

-March 28, 2017. 10:40 am – 12:55 pm

-Estimated Count #5 daily total: 2293 Brant

-MSWA-752. QB viewing stand-30. Seacrest to Admiral Tryon W-228. PV Com Park- 760. Mariner Way-500. Rath Trevor-23.

- We travelled as one group today, starting at the north end at the Little Qualicum River and finishing at Rath Trevor. A low tide had Brant feeding at the water's edge and huddled close together behind gravel bars. We saw several large rafts, several thousand each, of diving ducks (mostly Surf Scoters), off the MSWA, Parksville Bay and the mouth of the Englishman River. Two large groups of scaup and goldeneye were at the Little Qualicum River and Englishman River. A small herring spawn with the typical milky blue waters and foamy shoreline was observed off the east end of Surfside Drive in Qualicum Beach where gulls, divers and sea lions were active. Another small spawn off Seacrest was visible. At Columbia Beach (area 2) kite surfers disturbed all birds several times over the 30 minutes we were in the area. At Parksville Bay Brant were feeding and resting in the middle of the bay, keeping back from the shoreline where walkers and dogs were present. The low tide (~5') at Rath Trevor found Brant at the water's edge mixed with thousands of gulls, several walkers kept all birds on the move. Gull numbers remain high, at least 12-14,000 seen today.

-Conditions: Rain and wind with strong gusts. Crashing waves made viewing on the water difficult at times.

-7 counters: SG, JT, LW, DE, JG, EL, TW.

Brant Count #6 – Full length of PQBWMA

-April 4, 2017. 2:30 – 4:00 pm

-Estimated Count #6 daily total: 3343 Brant

-Surfside Drive. W & E-1475. Johnstone Rd-1565. PV Com Park-32. Mariner Way-66. Rath Trevor-205.

-We travelled as two groups today. Counting was more difficult with Brant feeding on the back side of high gravel bars and mixed with many thousands of gulls. Brant were quite thick in places so we waited for their flight after a disturbance to get our counts. Herring roe is still stacked 12" or more high at many sites with extensive coverage at the Little Qualicum River estuary and Columbia/Eaglecrest Beach shorelines. Tide pools were filled with many hundreds of Brant and gulls all picking roe from the shallow water. Rotting roe at the high tide line was alive with insects. No notable disturbances today. A large raft of 8,000+ mixed divers, mostly Surf Scoters, was active off Qualicum Beach.

-Conditions: Overcast, spitting rain during our count. A steady wind with occasional strong gusts. Visibility on the nearshore waters was fairly good but seas were too choppy further out on Strait of Georgia to see bird movements.

-7 counters: SG, LB, CW, LW, DE, TW, EL.

TABLE 1 --- PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 7, 8, 9

Brant Count #7 –Full length of PQBWMA

-April 11, 2017. 10:30 am – 12:00 pm

-Estimated Count #7 daily total: 3711 Brant

-Little Qualicum River mouth to Surfside Drive E- 645. Seacrest to Admiral Tryon-820. PV Com Park-1830. Rathrevor-416.

-We travelled as two groups today, one starting at the north end, the other at the south end, meeting at Johnstone Rd. Small flights of Brant moving up and down the Strait of Georgia and some coming from deep water where diving ducks and gulls were resting/feeding. Fewer sea lions, gulls and divers overall than last week. Large flocks of Bonaparte’s Gulls were notable. Herring roe still covers the beaches and the rotting process is noseworthy in places. No disturbances to report.

-Conditions: Calm seas with good visibility, a light cool wind off the water. Mostly sunny skies gave us “Brantastic” views of the Salish Sea.

-5 counters: SG, LB, DE, TW, EL.

Brant Count #8—Full length of PQBWMA

-April 18, 2017. 2:30 pm – 4:15 pm

-Estimated Count #8 daily total: 2776 Brant

-Little Qualicum River mouth to Surfside Drive E – 205. Seacrest-12. Johnstone Rd-1426. PV Com Park-18. Rathrevor-1115.

-We travelled as one group today starting at the north end. A low tide exposed some very high sandbars at the Little Qualicum estuary where we often see Brant feeding. Today they were in one large tide pool with gulls near the river mouth. From the foot of Johnstone Rd we got good looks at a large flock of Brant that were in and out of Admiral Tryon Pool several times due to eagle flights, beach walkers and gull movements. Gull and sea lion numbers have dropped substantially from two weeks ago. We almost missed the large group of Brant at Rathrevor that were feeding at the tide line quite deep in Craig Bay near Craig Bay Estates. This will be our last full length count as a group but because Brant numbers remain fairly high we counters will continue with incidental counts into early May.

-Conditions: Choppy seas with white caps and wind at exposed sites. Overcast with sunny periods and light showers.

-4 counters: SG, LB, DG, EL.

Brant Count #9—Full length of PQBWMA

-May 4, 2017. 4:15pm - 5:45pm

-Estimated Count #9 daily total: 11 Brant

-PV Com Park-11

-Warm weather inspired one more Count ... Observers covered all areas of PQBWMA, viewing from 7 locations. A very low tide exposed tidal flats and high gravel bars throughout the area. Bird numbers have dropped dramatically with most migrants already passed through our area. Only a few gulls were observed at each of the 7 stops, Bonaparte’s were most numerous, particularly at the Little Qualicum River. Scattered small groups of scoters remain in Craig Bay, off the mouth of the Englishman and Little Qualicum Rivers. Brant were absent except at Parksville Community Park where a small group of 11 were floating, keeping their distance from the numerous people on the beach, many with dogs off and on leash, skim boarders, and kite flyers. Rathrevor Beach also had numerous people out on the sand flats.

-Conditions: A fog bank was present offshore from the Little Qualicum River to French Creek, views of near shore activity were still good. Warm and sunny today with a light breeze.

-2 counters: SG, DG.

2017 date	Incidental Brant counts	Time (daylight hours)	<p align="center"><u>INCIDENTAL COUNTS -- TABLE 2</u> - location, conditions, remarks - Noted human disturbances are highlighted * = full length PQBWMA Observers: SG=Sandra Gray, DG=Dan Gray, JG=Jim Goodwin, DE=Dave Erickson, TW=Toni Wyckoff</p>
Fall & Winter 2016			Brant arrived late October. Many local birders reported counts of Brant late October through December.
Dec 18, 2016 *	221	8-4	Parksville Qualicum Beach Christmas Bird Count (BCPQ) covers full length of PQBWMA. Most seen near the mouth of Englishman River & in Craig Bay.
Jan 20	77	12-2	Rathtreavor, Area 3-from Brant Pt. SG & DG
Jan 24	22	1:30-1:45	QB viewing stand, Area 1 – SG & DG
Jan 26	46	10:30-12:30	Area 2 – SG & DG
Feb 1	266	1:30-3:30	Rathtreavor, Area 3 – SG & DG
Feb 7	0	12-1:30	Area 1- no Brant Little Qualicum River to Judges Row. 4” of snow along shoreline. Scattered scoters, dabblers. SG & DG
Feb 14	16	9:30-10:30	Columbia Beach, Area 2 – JG
Feb 17	336	12-2	Rathtreavor, Area 3 – SG & DG
Feb 26 *	526	10:45-12:35	Full length of PQBWMA: Rath-442, mouth of Eng R-24, Admiral Tryon E-15, Johnstone Rd-33, Butterball-12. Tidal Treasures (TT) seekers, dog and eagle disturbances at PV Com Park. SG & DG
March 1	540	11-12:45	Rathtreavor, Area 3 – SG & DG
March 12 *	1050-1300	11:30-3:30	3 persons doing incidental counts from different locations: MSWA Area 1; Area 2; Parksville Bay, Rathtreavor Area 3. An approximate count today due to repeated disturbances by eagles, TT seekers and kite surfers at Rathtreavor. JG, DE, SG
			Brant and other migratory waterfowl numbers are increasing due to the recent herring spawn and resulting increased food source. Locally the spawn started on March 4 in the Parksville Bay to French Creek marina area and continued up through Qualicum Beach then down to Craig/Northwest Bay/Nanoose.
March 15	450-500	2-3	Rathtreavor, Area 3- Low tide of 6’. Brant all at tide line mixed with gulls and dabblers. Strong winds disturbed Brant many times. People, dogs, eagles were not present today. SG & DG
March 16	1637	12:30-2:30	Little Qualicum River mouth, Area 1 - 3 counts over 2 hours - (1525, 1710, 1675, average of 1637). A few small groups flew in and out to deep water, most present the full time. 8-10,000 gulls present and very active. SG & DG

INCIDENTAL COUNTS -- TABLE 2

- location, conditions, remarks -

Noted human disturbances are highlighted

* = full length PQBWMA

Observers: SG=Sandra Gray, DG=Dan Gray, JG=Jim Goodwin, DE=Dave Erickson, TW=Toni Wyckoff

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March 19	210	12:30-2:30	Brant Pt, Rathtrevor, Area 1 – Brant on tidal flats close to Brant Pt mixed with thousands of gulls all thickly clustered feeding on herring eggs. Clouds of gulls constantly disturbed by gull flights, walkers, TT seekers and eagles. At least 60 TT seekers walking the beach over two hour period, Brant stayed away. Many dogs on pathway but only a few on the beach. Brant flying in small groups from Strait of Georgia off mouth of Eng R where huge raft of mixed divers including 4000+ scoters, many thousands gulls and hundreds mixed dabblers were all active. Walked in from west gate entry along Strait of Georgia shoreline. SG & DG
March 20	500+	1:15-2:45	Surfside Drive E, Area 1 – More Brant at mouth of Little Qualicum River, not able to count at 1km distant. Water & wind calm, all birds fairly quiet and feeding today with no disturbance from eagles or people. Many thousands of gulls. DG
March 23	1625	1-3	Little Qualicum River mouth, Area 1 – About 12’ tide with birds close to shore and on sand bar at river mouth. Brant flushed many times due to strong gusts, steady wind, gull movements and eagles. 4-5000+ gulls. Abundant herring roe along the shore, piled up at strandlines and floating. Mixed loose raft of 4-5000+ divers off river mouth - most Surf Scoters, Bufflehead, both goldeneye, Long-tailed Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers, many gulls mixed in and scattered across Strait of Georgia. No dogs or walkers. SG & DG
March 24	980	1:30-3:30	PV Com Park, Area 3 – Most Brant near mouth of river, some feeding along beach walkway when walkers and TT seekers were absent. Large raft of mixed divers in PV Bay and mouth of Eng R: 5000+ scoters, hundreds each goldeneye, Bufflehead, wigeon, Mallard, 6-7000+ gulls. SG & DG
March 25	60	12:30-2:30	Surfside Drive E, Area 1 – Very few Brant today, small groups coming from Strait of Georgia stopping at mouth of Little Qualicum River to mix with 2000+ gulls and 300+ dabblers. 15,000+ raft of mostly Surf Scoters by QB viewing stand, other divers mixed in. SG & DG
March 27	340	9:30-9:45	Rathtrevor, Area 3 – SG
March 27	3	2-3:30	Area 2 – Windy with few birds visible, gull numbers down considerably, 150 Bonaparte’s Gulls. SG & DG
March 30	500+	12:00	Little Qualicum River mouth, Area 1 – During Beached Bird Survey – large volume of herring roe, 8” thick in places, 10,000+ gulls, 700+ Mallard. Lots of food for many birds. TW
March 30	455	2:15-4:30	Area 2 – Brant feeding calmly and moving between Johnstone Rd & Seacrest with minimal disturbance by 5000+ gulls. No dogs, walkers or TT seekers. SG & DG

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March 30	390	5-5:15	PV Com Park, Area 3 – Several disturbances seen in just 15 minutes: numerous walkers & 1 photographer pushed very close to 310 Brant that he flushed repeatedly. SG & DG
April 2	550+	10-3	PV Com Park, Area 3 – Brant in the Bay event for BRANT WILDLIFE FESTIVAL.
April 3	2000+	3:00 & 4-4:45	Little Qualicum River mouth, Area 1 – Large group of Brant on back of gravel bars at mouth of river flushed many times by clouds of gulls. Several thousands of gulls. 12,000+ raft of mixed divers, mostly Surf Scoters. Two different incidental sightings by DE, SG, DG
April 5	850	3-4:30	Area 2 – SG & DG
April 10	0	11:30-45	Rathtreavor, Area 3 - Strong wind, no Brant seen, very few gulls. SG
April 14	375	12:00-15	PV Bay, Area 3 – SG & DG
April 14	2325	12:30-2	Area 2 – Disturbance! At least 20 TT seekers combing the high tide line at Admiral Tryon Pool flushed Brant many times over 1.5 hours. Brant often moving up and down shoreline from Seacrest to Admiral Tryon Pool every 10-15 minutes. SG & DG
April 14	0	2:00-2:15	Area 1 – No Brant visible. SG & DG
April 19	645	4-5	Rathtreavor, Area 1 – Strong winds, rain. SG & DG
April 21	670	1:30-3:30	Rathtreavor, Area 1 – Sunny and warm weather brought 30+ TT seekers to Brant Pt. Several kites flying at main beach area drove all birds deep into Craig Bay and way out to tideline to feed. At least 5 and up to 25 beach walkers constantly visible, all flushing Brant repeatedly. SG & DG
April 23	12	10:30	Qualicum Beach, Area 1 – Raft of 150+ scoters, few gulls. DG
April 28	6	12:45-2:45	Area 2 – Very few birds overall. SG & DG
April 30	0	1:15-3	Little Qualicum River mouth, Area 1 – On a very low tide, few birds overall. Six dogs on beach off and on leash, 3 were chasing gulls repeatedly, one dog walker was very rude when asked to put her dog on leash. SG & DG
May 2	23	12-2	Rathtreavor, Area 3 – Very few birds overall, less than 100 gulls over two hours. Brant retreating to Brant Pt after three large and one small dog running loose and one kite surfer along Strait of Georgia shoreline, all flushed Brant repeatedly. The few remaining Brant were challenged to feed with multiple disturbances after dog restrictions lifted. SG
May 4	0	11-1	Rathtreavor, Area 3 – DG

BRANT COUNT 2017 -- MISC

Disturbances

Disturbances to wildlife have been noted and highlighted in the **Primary Brant Counts 1-9, TABLE 1** and in the **Incidental Brant Counts, TABLE 2**.

Historically, factors of disturbance to Brant and other migratory wildlife along the PQBWMA shoreline have been mostly due to dogs, beach walkers and eagle flights. Other less frequent disturbances include: kite surfers, kite flyers, photographers, kayakers and skim boarders. Dog related disturbances seem to be fewer this year with most locals respecting the 'dogs off the beach' restrictions. Comments received highlighted that signage is inconsistent, varied, and confusing for dog owners due to the multiple jurisdictions. Suggestions offered included that uniformity in signage and restrictions across the area would provide better clarity for pet owners.

Unfortunately this year for the first time there were new and numerous disturbances due to people seeking hidden glass objects for the Tidal Treasures marketing campaign ... <http://www.tidaltreasures.org/> The three sites chosen for the search of the glass 'treasures', Brant Pt at Rath Trevor, Parksville Bay and Columbia Beach, all happen to be the *prime feeding areas for Brant*. Brant observers saw many Tidal Treasures seeker disturbances that *clearly* impacted the feeding of Brant and other wildlife. A win-win situation for all would be to adjust the Tidal Treasures timing to cease during the short window of increased wildlife activity during mid-February, March and April.

Efforts should be made to contact the Tidal Treasures partners to let them know the importance of the PQBWMA and how protected migratory wildlife were affected by the increase in human activity due to the long period of the TT hunt this year.

Mileage and total person hours of observation:

There was a round trip mileage of 57 km for each Primary Count from the centrally located starting point. In addition, the round trip mileage from home to and from the starting point for each of the counters was added into the total count mileage.

-The total mileage for the nine Primary Counts was 1164 km.

- Incidental counts were varied and no mileage was recorded.

-Total person-hours of observation for all Brant Count activities was 180 hours.

Observers initials used in Tables 1 and 2: SG=Sandra Gray, DG=Dan Gray, EL=Elaine LeFebvre, LB=Lynne Brookes, DE=Dave Erickson, DH=Dave Hutchings, JT=Jane Towill, JG=Jim Goodwin, RS=Roger Simms, LW=Larry Williams, TW=Toni Wyckoff, CW=Catherine Watson, DG=Derrick Grimmer.

A huge Thank You to all volunteers from the Arrowsmith Naturalists.

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