

-PARKSVILLE QUALICUM BEACH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA-

ESTIMATED DAILY BRANT COUNT REPORT - 2018

by the

ARROWSMITH NATURALISTS

for

THE NATURE TRUST OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Count Coordinator and Compiler

The **2018 Brant Primary Counts** covered the full length of the Parksville Qualicum Beach Wildlife Management Area (PQBWMA). Each of the eleven primary counts took place between mid-February and early May over a 1- 2.5 hour time period during daylight hours 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 October 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, 2017 and in other historical Brant counts within the PQBWMA and Strait of Georgia (SOG):

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

Area 2: Seacrest Place, Butterball Drive, Eaglecrest Beach, Johnstone Rd, Admiral Tryon Blvd West and East, Admiral Tryon pool, Columbia Beach, French Creek Marina (FrCrk)

Area 3: Parksville Community Park (PVComPark), Parksville Bay (PVBay), Mariner Way, Craig Bay, Rathrevor Provincial Park, Brant Point, Madrona Point

Total mileage of approximately 1375 km was accumulated by participating volunteers on the eleven primary counts, not including round trip from home. There was considerable additional mileage on incidental counts that was not recorded.

The seventeen 2018 Brant Count volunteer observers were: Sandra Gray, Dan Gray, Lynne Brookes, Toni Wyckoff, Ron Wyckoff, Maggie Little, Dave Hutchings, Tom Constable, Jim Goodwin, Helen Davidson, Jane Towill, Roger Simms, Helen Poncelet, Lou Poncelet, Elaine LeFebvre, Dave Erickson, David Helem. (Key to volunteer initials located on page 7.)

The total number of person-hours of observation was approximately 191 hours.

Summary of observations located on page 7.

TABLE 1: PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 1, 2, 3, 4

Brant Count 1 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total : 410 Brant

-February 16, 2018. 10:30-11:50
 -Rathrevor-400, PVComPark-5, Columbia Beach-5.
 -We split into two groups today. There were lots of Pacific Loons and gulls scattered and flying often out in deep water. Closer to shore were scattered goldeneye, bufflehead, grebes, numerous mallard and wigeon, 20 oystercatchers, all 3 scoters and a few larger rafts of scoters. Gulls on the sandbars were tucked in, overhead often and scattered along the shore. Eagles were plentiful with many immatures at all sites and most pairs near their nest trees, a few were seen with prey items. One dead harbour seal on the beach at Surfside Dr. The Brant were mostly at the south end this time, this is typical. As their numbers grow, more will show up throughout the PQBWMA and be seen at all our viewing sites. Rathrevor had lots of sand showing. We had a fairly low tide with big pools along Eaglecrest/Columbia Beach shoreline. Very few people were on the beaches.
 -Conditions: Choppy seas, some sun with spitting clouds and a steady wind.
 -5 observers: SG, TW, ML, TC, DH

Brant Count 2 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total : 375 Brant

-February 20, 2018. 10:30-12:30
 -Rathrevor-335. Mariner Way -4. Seacrest -36.
 - We travelled as one group, starting at Rathrevor and ending at the Little Qualicum estuary. Brant were flying about in small flocks when flushed by eagles and coming in from deep water to Craig Bay. Very few people were on the beaches.
 -Conditions: Arctic air and a recent snowfall have brought back wintery conditions. The sun was out and viewing in the glare at Rathrevor was challenging. Choppy seas hid birds out on the SOG.
 -3 observers: SG, TC, RS

Brant Count 3 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total : 772 Brant

-February 26, 2018. 10:00-11:30
 -Rathrevor-725. PVComPark-23. Kincaid-24.
 -We split into 3 groups today. Many small flocks of Brant were flying often. A dramatic scene at Rathrevor as we watched 600+ cronking Brant flushed by wind and eagles against huge black clouds and blue sky. Herring vessels were travelling up the SOG, the herring spawn has begun near Comox over the last few days. Two of our groups saw Orcas today, 2 off Beach Creek, 4 or 5 from the QB viewing stand, at least 3 from PV Com Park, likely the same group of Orcas travelling the SOG.
 -Conditions: Windy, choppy seas, sunny, clouds moving through, drizzle, lowest daytime tide.
 -8 observers: SG, LB, EL, JG, JT, TC, ML, HD

Brant Count 4 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total : 1875 Brant

-March 5, 2018. 11:15-1:15
 -Rathrevor-60. Mariner Way-472. PVComPark-740. French Crk-22. Admiral Tryon W-153. Johnstone-300. Seacrest-83. QB Viewing stand-14. Kincaid-10. MSWA-21.
 -We split into 3 groups today. Herring spawn along the full length of PQBWMA. Fishing vessels, thousands of gulls and hundreds of eagles all flushing Brant regularly. Brant flying in small flocks often and large flocks of several hundred moving up and down the coastline between our counting areas, all a challenge to count. Gull numbers have risen. Incredible rafts of scoters have arrived. Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Long-tail Ducks, Mallard, American Wigeon, Northern Pintails, Dunlin all here enjoying the abundance of nutrient that the herring provide. Orcas were seen off Seacrest today.
 -Conditions: Calm seas, cloud cover with good visibility.
 -10 observers: SG, LB, DH, JT, ML, HD, TW, JG, LP, HP

TABLE 1: PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 5, 6, 7, 8**Brant Count 5 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 3150 Brant**

-March 12, 2018. 9:50-11:20

-Rath Trevor-2000. PVBay-45. Area 2 -931. Beach Crk-55. Surfside Dr-119.

-We split into 3 groups again and were able to complete the count in 1.5 hrs. The fishing fleet has moved on but many of the birds and sea lions are still here feeding. Two large rafts of divers off Qualicum Beach had some Brant mixed in with scoters, Long-tail Ducks, scaup. We saw other migrants: many hundreds of goldeneye & Bufflehead, American Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Harlequin, some grebes, Dunlin. Gulls were mixed in everywhere we looked but their numbers have dropped since last week. Clouds of gulls were flying often or huddled together on sandbars. Very few people were on the beaches.

-Conditions: Calm seas, some cloud cover with good visibility.

-10 observers: SG, LB, HP, JG, TW, ML, HD, RS, DH, TC

Brant Count 6 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 2437 Brant

-March 20, 2018. 10:30-12:00

-Rath Trevor-500. Mariner Way-12. PVComPark-85. French Crk Marina- 188. Admiral Tryon W-550. Seacrest-932. QB Beach-53. Kincaid-109. MSWA-8.

-We had 3 groups again today and finished the count in 1.5 hrs. Several large rafts of 500-10k mostly diving ducks are still present off the full length of the PQBWMA. Scoters outnumber all. Scaup, Long-tail ducks, goldeneye, Bufflehead, wigeon, Harlequin, Mallard, grebes, loons and gulls are in abundance. Brant are mixing with the rafts that are often 1-2 km offshore, safety in numbers for sure. Sea lions are fewer than last week, their barking and roaring an addition to the Brant croaking, scoter singing, gull screaming and tooting ducks... all a delight for the senses. Brant have been concentrated along Columbia and Eaglecrest Beach area where roe has settled and the seaweeds have developed auras of flies ... more invertebrates to feed all.

-Conditions: Calm seas, some cloud cover and blue sky, good visibility, 8 degrees with a high overcast.

-9 observers: SG, LB, JT, TC, DE, DH, ML, HD, TW

Brant Count 7 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 4302 Brant

-March 29, 2018. 9:50-11:50

-Rath Trevor- 3238. PVBay-324. Columbia Beach-10. Surfside Dr- 730.

-We split into two groups today. A low daytime tide revealed many tide pools that held numerous dabblers and gulls feeding on herring roe along the length of Columbia/Eaglecrest Beach. Fresh roe up to 4" thick was seen at the west end of Seacrest at the high tide line. Brant were huddled closely and feeding with gulls in the deep pools at the Little Qualicum estuary. Flocks of diving and dabbling ducks were frequently flying up and down the shoreline. The several rafts of divers were smaller than last week and more spread out with no Brant mixed in. Choppy seas limited visibility on the SOG. Very few beach walkers and no dogs were seen on the beaches.

-Conditions: Choppy seas, overcast with a light rain, 10km/h wind with some strong gusts.

-4 observers: SG, DG, LB, TW

Brant Count 8 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 2723 Brant

-April 6, 2018. 1:20-3:30.

-Rath Trevor- 1400. PV Bay- 230. Columbia Beach-9. Johnstone Rd-409. Seacroft-675.

-With two groups today we covered many kilometers of exposed gravel bars and large pools along the length of the PQBWMA. Brant were mostly spread out along the water line feeding on the still present herring roe and variety of seaweeds. We saw long, deep mounds of rotting seaweed along the shoreline at many sites. We found a large group of Brant west of the foot of Seacroft feeding in deep rocky pools, we have not seen them previously at this site. No Brant at the Englishman or Little Qualicum Rivers or out on the SOG. Gull and diving duck numbers have dropped dramatically. Northern Pintails were the most numerous dabbler.

-Conditions: Choppy seas, windy, drizzle, a bit of sun poking through the cloud cover.

-6 observers: SG, LB, TW, DH, JT, ML

TABLE 1: PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 9, 10, 11 (Noted human disturbances are highlighted)

Brant Count 9 - full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 3450 Brant

-April 10, 2018. 2:20-3:40.

-Rath Trevor-1652. Mariner Way-8. PVBay- 200. Admiral Tryon W-85. Johnstone Rd-165. Butterball-9. Beach Crk-223. Surfside Dr-580. MSWA-528.

-We split into 3 groups to cover the PQBWMA over an 80 minute span. Rath Trevor Beach had the largest flock of Brant at the water line and several hundred flew in while watching. There were several disturbances to Brant feeding where sudden flight occurred with no obvious reason, likely the strong wind gusts were to blame. Most walkers were staying high up on the beach, dog walkers were mostly absent. A noteworthy incidental count by David Helem from April 9, 9:30am, recorded 2900 Brant at Rath Trevor during the Coastal Waterbird Survey suggesting that Brant numbers dropped rapidly at this time due to changing weather conditions. We saw very few gulls. Divers were scattered with no rafts seen. Lines of Surf Scoters were heading south. Dabblers were many but scattered along the water line and feeding in rocky pools. Dunlin, Black Turnstones, Black-bellied Plovers, Greater Yellowlegs and Black Oystercatchers were all present. Over a thousand Brant have been regularly seen near the Little Qualicum River estuary.

-Conditions: A slight chop on the water, windy with strong gusts at times, cloudy with some sunny patches, heavy to light rain ... quite the mix of weather conditions today.

-7 observers: SG, HD, LB, JG, DH, TW, ML

Brant Count 10 -full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 2285 Brant

-April 17, 2018. 10:40-12:20.

-Rath Trevor-980. PVBay-480. Admiral Tryon W-280. Johnstone Rd-4. Seacrest-137. QB Viewing stand-347. Surfside Dr E-57.

-Our two groups had good weather and a very low tide. Warm weather activities are on the increase including beach walkers, kite flying, kayakers, only one dog seen running loose. We saw scattered dabblers, Bufflehead and goldeneye, ten Great Blue Herons, Black-bellied Plovers. Small scoter flocks were moving up and down the Strait. Red-necked and Horned Grebe were all in breeding plumage. Gulls were few, most were Bonaparte's. Bird numbers are down, hundreds overall, compared to thousands a month ago. Brant were mostly feeding at the waterline, well away from human activity.

-Conditions: Windy with a slight chop on the water, good visibility, partly cloudy skies.

-5 observers: SG, LB, JG, ML, TW

Brant Count 11-full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 33 Brant

-May 1, 2018. 12:45-2:45.

-Rath Trevor-33.

-A last full length count for the season. We started at Madrona Pt where most of the sandbars of Craig Bay could be seen on today's 1 foot tide. The 33 Brant were off Brant Pt with scattered gulls, 1 Whimbrel & 3 dogs off leash. The west side of PVBay had 80+ Bald Eagles (most hunting in pools for Plainfin Midshipman Fish), 8 dogs off leash and numerous walkers and photographers all causing disturbances to the eagles. From Johnstone Rd to Seacrest there were 14 dogs off leash within a 15 minute time period. 4 Great Blue Herons near the QB viewing stand.

-Conditions: Windy and clear.

-2 observers: SG, DG

Date 2018	Incidental Brant counts	Time daylight hrs	<p align="center">TABLE 2: INCIDENTAL BRANT COUNTS</p> <p align="center">location - remarks - observer</p> <p align="center">Noted human disturbances are highlighted.</p> <p align="center">Key to observers initials located on page 7.</p>
late Oct – late Nov 2017	10-55		Rath Trevor & PVBay. Brant were seen numerous times. SG, DG & other local birders.
Nov 22, 2017	11	1:30-1:45	PVBay. SG, DG
Dec 17, 2017	218	8:00-4:00	BCPQ count circle, seen by 4 Christmas Bird Count teams.
Jan 1	11	11:00-1:00	PVBay. Polar Bear Swim, lots of people & dogs. SG, DG
Jan 11	109	11:00-11:15	Rath Trevor. SG
Jan 20	120	1:00-1:15	Rath Trevor. SG
Feb 4	181	12:30-2:30	Brant Pt, Rath Trevor. SG, DG
Feb 8	306	1:00-3:00	Rath Trevor. Brant arriving in small groups, people pushing close to them for photos. A few dogs off leash. SG
Feb 9	0	12:45-3:30	LQ River estuary. SG, DG
Feb 12	6	1:30-3:30	Surfside Dr E, LQ River estuary. Calm, good visibility. Few birds nearshore, 100s gulls & Pacific Loons 3+km out, feeding frenzy=herring. SG, DG
Feb 12	80	10:00-10:15	Rath Trevor. From Madrona Pt on Coastal Waterbird Survey. DHM.
Feb 19	555	1:00-2:30	Rath Trevor. Arctic air, 2" snow on the beach. Sunny, good visibility. 1k+ gulls, 100s dabblers, scoter rafts, shorebirds. All birds spread across the tide line feeding calmly, few walkers. SG, DG
Feb 22	83	12:00-1:30	Johnstone to Seacrest, Area 2. Snow on beach, arctic air. One large flock of Brant up & down the beach. Eagles flushed 4x, walkers 2x. Six dogs off leash running & flushing all birds. 300+ dabblers, 200+ gulls, Bufflehead, goldeneye, oystercatchers, turnstones, plovers, dunlin, Killdeer, 5 Greater Yellowlegs. SG, DG
Feb 25	2	12:00-1:30	French Crk marina. Gulls & dabblers vigorously feeding at tide line. Small herring spawn on beach east of marina. SG
Feb 25	250+	2:00-2:15	Rath Trevor. DH
March 1	230	12:00-2:00	Rath Trevor, Brant Pt, Craig Bay. Herring vessels heading north, TUVUs, gulls & scoters overhead & heading north, diving duck numbers up. SG, DG
March 4	1100+	12:00-2:00	PVBay. Herring spawn Eng R to Fr Crk , numerous boats, 10k+ gulls. Brant flushed often by gulls, eagles, fishery activity. 3 GBHE, 40+ BAEAs, many human spectators. SG, DG
March 5	300+	10:30-10:45	Rath Trevor. DE
March 5	1000-1500	1:00-1:15	Seacrest. Herring spawn . Brant in water & flying often, large raft of scoters offshore. LP, HP
March 6	240+	11:00-12:15	PVBay. Herring spawn . Views from Eng R to FrCrk marina. 60-80 stayed feeding in PVBay, groups of 6-30 moving often. SG, DG
March 6	950+	12:30-2:45	Area 2. Herring spawn , fish boats, many 1000s of gulls. Raft of 5k+ scoters & other divers off Seacrest. Brant very active, flushed by gulls, eagles, fishing activity. SG, DG
March 9	5	1:30-3:45	Area 1. 4k+ raft of Surf Scoters & LT Ducks off LQ River estuary. SG
March 9	820	3:45-4:00	Area 2. 5k+ raft of divers, 1000s of gulls very active, shoreline white w/gulls, dabblers mixed in, eagles overhead often, flushing all birds. SG, DG
March 10	200	3:00-3:15	Butterball. DE
March 12	500	1:00-1:15	Rath Trevor. DE

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March 14	1275	2:00-4:00	Columbia Beach to Seacrest, Area 2. Roe floating & piled along shore. Brant feeding w/gulls at waterline FrCrk to Admiral Tryon Pool. All flushed often by eagles, gull movements, dogs x5, kids playing. SG, DG
March 15	153	2:00-4:00	Rath Trevor. 6+ walkers & dogs high up on beach, no disturbances. Raft of 3k divers off Brant Pt. SG, DG
March 17	1450	2:00-4:15	Area 1 & 2. 2 large rafts of 10k+ divers each, off Seacrest & LQ River estuary. 1000+ each of LT Duck, scaup, goldeneye, Bufflehead. Grebes, loons, dabblers mixed in. SG, DG
March 18	200	11:45-12:00	Rath Trevor. Birders from Victoria Natural History Society
	30	11:45-12:00	Surfside Dr. DE
	45	12:15-12:30	PV Bay. SG, DG
	480	1:00-1:15	Columbia Beach. SG, DG
	842	1:15-2:45	Butterball to Seacrest. SG, DG
	total=1867		Daily estimate full length of PQBWMA from 3 observer groups over 3 hrs.
March 19	650-700	11:00-11:15	Admiral Tryon W & E. JG
March 22	94	2:00-2:30	Mariner Way. Large raft of divers w/Brant mixed in. SG, DG
March 28	0	1:30-3:30	QB viewing stand. 10k+ raft of divers, 3 scoter sps, LT Ducks, goldeneye, scaup, Bufflehead, few loons & grebes. 3k+ gulls dabbling roe. SG, DG
March 30	~1800	9:00-11:00	Brant Pt, Rath Trevor, Craig Bay. During walk for Brant Wildlife Festival, 23 persons. Brant feeding at waterline & flying often. SG, DG
March 31	~700	10:45-11:45	LQ R estuary. During Beached Bird Survey. TW, RW
April 9	690	1:30-3:30	LQ R estuary. SG, DG
April 9	2900	9:30-9:45	Rath Trevor. From Madrona Pt on Coastal Waterbird Survey, DHM.
April 12	980	12:00-3:30	LQ R estuary. A very low tide with Brant on far side of gravel bars. Many gulls, dabblers & walkers/dogs, 15+ eagles, =many disturbances. SG, DG
April 17	~450	2:30-4:00	QB viewing stand. No Brant until 3:45 as large flock of 450 came in close trying to land, did not land due to numerous beach walkers/dogs. Brant scattered, disturbed, calling & hugged shoreline heading west. SG, DG
April 18	1012	2:15-4:15	Rath Trevor. Brant feeding at waterline, most behind gravel bar. Walkers disturbed 6x pushing close. SG, DG
April 19	1540	1:15-3:15	Rath Trevor. From Madrona Pt on low tide. SG, DG
April 21	0	2:15-4:15	QB viewing stand. No Brant, very few birds overall. SG, DG
April 22	30	11:15-2:15	LQ R estuary. SG, DG
April 23	18	1:30-3:30	Admiral Tryon Pool. SG, DG
April 24	350	2:30-3:30	LQ R estuary. During Beached Bird Survey. TW, RW
April 25	245	2:15-4:15	Rath Trevor, Craig Bay. From Madrona Pt. SG, DG
May 2	23	2:00-4:00	Brant Pt, Rath Trevor. SG, DG

BRANT COUNT 2018 – Summary of observations

Brant count volume for 2018 appears to be a bit higher this year than 2017.

-All Brant counted during the 11 primary counts = 21,812

-6 peak counts = 18,347

-Regressed volume 2018 = 12, 693 (18,347 x 0.67 + 400). Method courtesy of Sean Boyd of Environment Canada.

-Regressed volumes for 6 peak counts: 2015 = 9091, 2016 = 4710, 2017 = 12,202

Disturbances to wildlife are noted and highlighted in Table 1: Primary Brant Counts 1-11, and in Table 2: Incidental Brant Counts.

Historically disturbance factors to Brant and other migratory wildlife along the PQBWMA shoreline have been mostly due to dogs, beach walkers (including amateur and professional photographers) and eagle flights. Other less frequent disturbances include kite surfers, kite flyers, kayakers and skim boarders. Observed dog related disturbances were fewer this year than in 2017. Public awareness due to increased visible signage may be a factor influencing locals to respect the ‘dogs off the beach’ restrictions that apply in some areas. A sharp increase in the number of off leash dogs occurs in early May as soon as the restrictions ease. It remains common to see dogs off leash throughout the year along the length of the PQBWMA regardless of the year-round ‘on leash’ regulations and signage that is visible at beach accesses.

In 2017 many human disturbances resulted from the Tidal Treasures marketing campaign (<http://www.tidaltreasures.org/>). This year Tidal Treasures partly changed their treasure hiding locations. Columbia Beach and part of Rath Trevor Beach were removed and the resorts shoreline next to Rath Trevor was added. The three sites chosen for the search for glass ‘treasures’ were: Site 1-Rath Trevor’s SOG shoreline, Brant Pt and most of the main beach at Rath Trevor; Site 2-resorts shoreline; Site 3-Parksville Bay. All of these remain **prime feeding areas for Brant**. Brant observers saw fewer Tidal Treasures related disturbances this year.

Mileage and total person hours of observation:

From the centrally located starting point round trip mileage was 55 km for each Primary Count. Total mileage does not include round trip mileage from home to the central meeting point, differing from previous year’s reports.

-The total mileage for the eleven Primary Counts was **1375 km**.

- Incidental counts were varied and no mileage was recorded.

-Total person-hours of observation for all Brant Count activities was approximately **191 hours**.

Key to observers initials used in Tables 1 and 2: SG=Sandra Gray, DG=Dan Gray, LB=Lynne Brookes, TW=Toni Wyckoff, RW=Ron Wyckoff, ML=Maggie Little, DH=Dave Hutchings, TC=Tom Constable, JG=Jim Goodwin, HD=Helen Davidson, JT=Jane Towill, RS=Roger Simms, HP= Helen Poncelet, LP=Lou Poncelet, EL=Elaine LeFebvre, DE=Dave Erickson, David Helem=DHM

A huge THANK YOU to all volunteers from the Arrowsmith Naturalists.

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