

PQBWMA BRANT COUNT REPORT -2019- Page 1 of 7
PARKSVILLE QUALICUM BEACH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
ESTIMATED DAILY BRANT COUNT REPORT – 2019

by the
ARROWSMITH NATURALISTS
For
THE NATURE TRUST OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Sandra Gray
Count Coordinator and Compiler

The **2019 Brant Primary Counts** covered the full length of the Parksville Qualicum Beach Wildlife Management Area (PQBWMA). Each of the 12 primary counts as shown in **TABLE 1** took place February 19 to April 30 during daylight hours. Observers met at a central location then divided down into 1, 2 or 3 groups, each 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 mid-October through April. The incidental counts show the concentrations of Brant at specific locations. While many counts were approximately two hours in length, some were as short as 15 minutes.

Count locations include the following named places which were also used in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and in other historical Brant counts within the PQBWMA and Strait of Georgia (SOG).

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

Area 2: Seacrest Place, Butterball Dr, Johnstone Rd, Admiral Tryon Blvd West and East, Columbia Beach, French Creek Marina.

Area 3: Parksville Community Park, Parksville Bay, Englishman River mouth, Mariner Way, Craig Bay, Rath Trevor Provincial Park, Brant Point, Madrona Point.

The twenty-three 2019 Brant Count volunteer observers were: Sandra Gray, Dan Gray, Lynne Brookes, Sue Wilson, Claire Summers, Helen Davidson, Tom Constable, Evelyn Constable, Toni Wyckoff, Ron Wyckoff, Bonnie Mullin, Frank Van Manen, Jim Goodwin, Dave Erickson, Roger Simms, Jane Towill, Pat Jacobson, Derrick Grimmer, Al Kirkley, Barry Avis, Hilary Avis, David Helem, Duncan Campbell.

(Key to volunteer initials located on page 7).

Summary of observations located on page 7.

TABLE 1: PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 1,2,3,4 (Disturbances are highlighted)

Brant Count #1 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 332 Brant

-February 19, 2019. 10:30-12:00
 -Rathtrever -292, PV Com Park-18, Columbia Beach -7, Surfside Dr -15.
 -We split into 3 groups for our first Brant Count of the year. Rathtrever Beach held the largest group of Brant as well as 100s of shorebirds. American Wigeon were the most numerous dabbler. Mallard, Northern Pintail, Bufflehead, goldeneye, Harlequin, scoters and many flocks of 10-200 gulls each were scattered along the shoreline. 15 Great Blue Heron at the MSWA, adjacent to Little Qualicum River. Disturbances include walkers along the tideline at Rathtrever and Surfside Dr, 2 dogs on the beach at PV Bay. A cold day with weather moving in left most beaches empty.
 -Conditions: Overcast, 3 degrees C, light wind, slight chop, 4-10" of snow remaining after recent arctic air and snow storms. Lowest daytime tide.
 -9 counters: SG, LB, JT, TC, TW, HD, DE, FVM, SW

Brant Count #2 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 500 Brant

-February 26, 2019. 1:20-3:15
 -Rathtrever -476. Admiral Tryon -13. Johnstone Rd -6. Butterball -5.
 -Our 3 groups of counters enjoyed blue skies with spectacular snowy peaks visible in all directions. Most Brant were concentrated near Brant Pt at Rathtrever. Dabbler numbers are up from last week, they were mixed with gulls everywhere we went. Scattered divers, Black Oystercatchers, clouds of Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover, Black Turnstones, Killdeer. 192 Canada Geese at French Creek estuary. No large movements of birds on the SOG. At least 9 dogs were seen off leash, many people on the beaches.
 -Conditions: Calm, sunny, cold, some snow remains in patches near the shoreline.
 -9 counters: SG, TW, HD, TC, EC, CS, LB, FVM, SW

Brant Count #3 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 1074 Brant

-March 5, 2019. 10:15-12:40
 -Rathtrever -302. Eng R mouth -182. PV Com Park -9. Admiral Tryon E -32. Johnstone Rd -388. Butterball -2. QB viewing stand -62. Surfside Dr W -97.
 -We split into 3 groups today to find Brant feeding at more of the northern sites than last week. Rathtrever Beach, the mouth of the Englishman River and Columbia Beach hold the largest concentrations of Brant. Dabbler, diving duck, gull and shorebird numbers have increased. Very few people were on the beaches as we still have some lingering arctic air. Herring vessels were moving up the SOG, we expect the herring spawn any day now. There were very few sea lions in our area and no large rafts of divers or bait balls with gull activity.
 -Conditions: Constant light onshore wind, choppy seas, good visibility, mostly clear skies. Lowest daytime tide.
 -11 counters: SG, LB, CS, BM, RS, DE, JT, TW, TC, FVM, SW

Brant Count #4 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 554 Brant

-March 11, 2019. 1:00-4:00
 -Rathtrever -358. Mariner Way -3. Johnstone Rd -92. Seacrest -101. Surfside Dr E -82.
 -The herring spawn has reached our shoreline along with an incredible selection of wildlife. The largest group of Brant are still at Rathtrever, they were feeding at the tide line mixed with gulls, dabblers & shorebirds. There were 100s of dabblers & 1000s of gulls at the mouth of the Englishman River. Parksville Bay to French Creek hosted most of the spawn activity & fishing vessels, 120+ eagles, numerous sea lions, 10k+ gulls, 2 large rafts of 7k+ divers including mostly scoters and 100s each of scaup, goldeneye &, bufflehead. Columbia Beach to Seacrest and the Little Qualicum estuary was all white water and crashing waves which made for challenging viewing conditions. Gull, diver & dabbler numbers were considerably less at the north end of the PQBWMA.
 -Conditions: Strong winds, very choppy seas, low tide.
 -1 counter: SG

TABLE 1: PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 5,6,7,8 (Disturbances are highlighted)

Brant Count #5 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 994 Brant

-March 12, 2019. 1:20-3:40
 -Rath Trevor -390. PV Com Park -48. Johnstone Rd -383. Seacrest -129. QB viewing stand -15. Surfside Dr E -29.
 -We split into 2 groups. The herring spawn continues with seiners only fishing at this time. Rath Trevor beach was strewn with gulls, dabblers and shorebirds. Parksville Bay has been invaded by many 1000s of frenzied gulls and a large mixed raft of diving ducks including scoters, 550+ scaup, 400+ goldeneye, bufflehead & mergansers. One River Otter was observed enjoying the herring feast. Numerous eagles were perched along the shoreline trees, flying overhead often and sitting on rocks and gravel bars watching the action. The gull, eagle and sea lion activity was intense at times and was observed throughout the PQBWMA. Brant were often spooked by gull and eagle movements.
 -Conditions: Strong winds continue, crashing waves, sun-cloud mix. Challenging viewing conditions.
 -5 counters: SG, BM, AK, CS, TW

Brant Count #6 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 1024 Brant

-March 19, 2019. 10:30-2:00
 -Rath Trevor -129. Mariner Way -29. PV Bay -42. West PV Bay -210+. Admiral Tryon W&E -472. Johnstone Rd -2. Butterball -74. Seacrest -2. Surfside Dr -64.
 -We split into 3 groups today and saw scattered dabblers, divers, loons, gulls and shorebirds at all sites. The west side of Parksville Bay had a massive raft of mixed divers (mostly Surf Scoters), dabblers and gulls feeding off the results of the recent herring spawn. The 10k+ raft also held scaup, Long-tailed Duck, goldeneye, Bufflehead, mergansers, Harlequin, American Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail and Brant. We could not get close enough to the massive raft of birds to assess accurately and suspect there were many more than 210 Brant mixed in. Gulls are fewer this week, they have likely moved northward to Qualicum Bay where a spawn took place today. Eagle numbers have dropped with fewer disturbances and hunting flights. Many beach walkers were out at the tideline pushing birds along, very few dogs on the beach.
 -Conditions: Calm, sunny and warm, clear skies.
 -9 counters: SG, DG, LB, JG, CS, HD, TC, RS, TW

Brant Count #7 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 2121 Brant

-March 26, 2019. 1:15-3:20
 -Rath Trevor - 705. Mariner Way -66. PV Bay -272. PV Com Park- 38. Columbia Beach -474. Seacrest -401. QB viewing stand -14. Surfside Dr E -94. Surfside Dr W -57.
 -The 3 groups of observers saw a mix of weather conditions and many kilometers of exposed gravel bars. Brant numbers have picked up this week, most gulls have moved on and the large rafts of diving ducks were absent. Groups of scoters, Mallard, wigeon, bufflehead, goldeneye and mergansers were present throughout the PQBWMA. Black Oystercatchers, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover and Great Blue Heron were seen feeding at numerous sites. Today's disturbances include: 11 people at Rath Trevor pushing birds along the water line; 18 young people on the beach at PV Bay; 2 dogs off leash at Kincaid Rd. There were others with dogs on and off leash but they stayed high up on the beach. No dogs at Rath Trevor or PV Bay. Eagle disturbance flights were fewer, most immatures have moved on and adults are likely incubating by now. A rainbow appeared at the end of our day.
 -Conditions: Sun, rain, light winds, calm seas.
 -15 counters: SG, SW, JG, FVM, BA, HA, TC, CS, HD, TW, LB, DG, DE, BM, PJ

Brant Count #8 – full length of PQBWMA -Estimated daily total: 458 Brant

-April 4, 2019. 10:15-12:15
 -Rath Trevor -300. Mariner Way -3. PV Bay -8. Columbia Beach -5. Butterball -20. Seacrest -17. QB viewing stand -25. LQ estuary -80.
 -Our 3 groups of observers enjoyed sun, surf and wildlife along the PQ shoreline. Rath Trevor Beach continues to hold the largest group of Brant although numbers are down this week to about 25% of what we saw during the previous 4 years for early April. Have we missed them? Will more arrive next week? Dabblers were spread along the full length of our survey area. Diving ducks, gulls and shorebirds were scattered along the shore, their numbers decreasing as birds move to breeding grounds. Very few people on the beaches today, eagles were the most common figures on the gravel bars.
 -Conditions: Strong SE winds, choppy seas, white water, surf, sun/cloud mix.
 -9 counters: SG, JG, FVM, TC, BM, CS, AK, SW, JT

TABLE 1: PRIMARY BRANT COUNTS 9,10,11,12 (Disturbances are highlighted)

Brant Count #9 – full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 1475 Brant

-April 9, 2019. 1:20-3:50

-Rathtreavor -1135. PV Com Park -47. French Creek marina -3. Seacrest -44. QB beach -46. LQ estuary -200+.

- Our two groups of observers succeeded in finding more Brant this week, Rathtreavor continues to be 'the site for Brant'. The mouths of the Englishman River & French Creek had a mix of dabblers, gulls, mergansers and Bufflehead. Area 2 beaches were surprisingly quiet with minimal bird activity and only one Dunlin cloud of ~200 wheeling about. Qualicum Beach had several small rafts of sea lions and one small Humpback Whale quite close to shore. We watched the whale surface at least 10 times over 30 minutes. From the east end of Surfside Dr we viewed: Brant thickly clustered and well-hidden on the back of gravel bars where they were feeding quietly; groups of Red-breasted Mergansers mixed with Harlequins; Horned Grebes in breeding plumage; several groups of very active Pacific Loons; and small flights of scoters moving up & down the SOG. At Rathtreavor 14 people on the beach and no dogs. Parksville Bay had 20 people scattered across the exposed sand bars. Qualicum Beach had most people using the waterfront walkway with and without dogs.

-Conditions: Sunny, clouding over, light winds, low tide.

-7 counters: SG, FVM, SW, LB, DG, CS, BM

Brant Count #10 – full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 1053 Brant

-April 16, 2019. 10:15-1:45

-Rathtreavor -350+. PV Bay -420. LQ estuary -283.

-Our two groups of observers saw another drop in Brant numbers this week, less than half of each of the previous 4 years mid-April counts. Rathtreavor, PV Bay and the LQ estuary remain the most reliable sites for Brant, with none seen in Area 2. American Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail, mergansers, Bufflehead and goldeneye were active at the mouth of the Englishman River, scattered elsewhere. Small flights of scoters were heading north.

Gull numbers continue to drop. Bonaparte's Gulls were lively at several sites. Black Oystercatchers, Dunlin, yellowlegs and Black-bellied Plover were seen at several sites. 1 Long-billed Curlew was at the LQ estuary. Rathtreavor and PV Bay each had one off leash dog chasing Brant and other birds over large areas.

-Conditions: Overcast, rain/clouds moving in, 8 degrees C, breezy with strong wind gusts.

-6 counters: SG, BM, SW, LB, CS, HD

Brant Count #11 – full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 859 Brant

-April 23, 2019. 1:15-3:00

-Rathtreavor -648. PV Com Park -41. LQ estuary -170.

-We split into 3 groups. A low tide of 3' made observations more difficult as birds were feeding on the back side of gravel bars and well-hidden in rocky tide pools. Brant numbers continue to drop. Gulls, diving ducks and dabblers were all more scarce this week. Bonaparte's Gulls appear to be the most numerous gull right now. The mouth of the Englishman River had 250+ dabblers including wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal. Bufflehead, mergansers and scoters were seen in small groups at several sites. People and dogs were few today with minimal disturbance to feeding wildlife.

-Conditions: Sunny and warm, steady wind with strong gusts at times, white caps, choppy seas.

-7 counters: SG, HD, RS, SW, JG, PJ, FVM

Brant Count #12 – full length of PQBWMA - Estimated daily total: 225 Brant

-April 30, 2019. 10:20-12:30

-Rathtreavor -192. Mariner Way -9. PV Bay -3. Surfside Dr -21.

-We split into 3 groups for our last full length Brant Count. Most Brant were feeding along the water line close to Madrona Pt where the eel grass beds are thick. We saw scattered gulls, dabblers, mergansers, Bufflehead, Black Oystercatchers and Great Blue Heron at several sites and 3 Whimbrel in Area 2. The west side of PV Bay, where the herring spawn was heaviest this year, had 20+ Bald Eagles perched on rocks among the tide pools, likely hunting for Plainfin Midshipman Fish. Lots of sand showing with very few people on the beaches. Off leash dogs were seen at Rathtreavor, PV Bay and Area 2.

-Conditions: Sunny, light winds, good visibility on the lowest daytime tide.

-7 counters: SG, LB, BM, JG, TW, TC, HD

Date 2019	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>
Mid Oct 2018-late Jan 2019	1-175		Rathtreavor & PV Bay. Brant were seen numerous times by local birders.
Dec 16, 2018	120	8:00-4:00	BCPQ count circle, seen by Christmas Bird Count teams
Dec 27, 2018	42	15 min	PV Com Park. JG
Jan 25	15	12:00-2:30	Mariner Way. SG, DG
Feb 4	224	2:00-2:15	Rathtreavor. SG, DG
Feb 6	178	12:00-3:00	Rathtreavor. SG, DG
Feb 11	36	15 min	Rathtreavor. DH on Coastal Waterbird Survey
Feb 12	20	11:30-11:45	Rathtreavor. DH
Feb 13	154	12:00-2:30	Rathtreavor. 10" snow on the beach. Mallard, wigeon, gulls, 3 GBHE, Dunlin, plovers. 25 walkers kept Brant moving. 3 dogs off leash. SG, DG
Feb 21	463	12:30-3:15	Brant Pt to Craig Bay. Busy wintry day w/10-25 walkers constant, some with dogs. Gulls, dabblers, shorebirds & Brant, all in motion often from disturbances. Small groups of Brant coming from deep water into Bay. No loon or gull movement yet on SOG. Herring vessels on SOG. SG, DG
Feb 24	50	1:15-1:30	Marina Way. DE
March 1	3	11:30-2:00	LQ River estuary. SG, DG
March 1	10	11:15-11:30	PV Com Park. SW
March 2	507	1:00-3:00	Rathtreavor. Numerous walkers, those w/dogs using inland path. SG, DG
March 3	41	4:00-4:15	Rathtreavor. SG, DG
March 4	286	12:30-2:30	Johnstone Rd to Seacrest. SG
March 7	450	12:00-12:15	Admiral Tryon E. SG
March 7	166	1:30-3:00	Admiral Tryon W. SG, DG
March 7	295	2:45-3:00	LQ estuary. JG
March 8	350	12:00-2:00	Johnstone Rd to Seacrest. SG
March 9	365	1:30-3:30	Johnstone Rd to Seacrest. SG
March 13	35	1:00-4:30	Area 2. Herring spawn. 1000s of gulls & numerous sea lions. At Columbia Beach 120 Bald Eagles in feeding frenzy, all within 300m. SG, DG
March 14	18	2:00-2:15	French Creek. HD
March 14	15	2:45-3:00	Columbia Beach. HD
March 15	150	2:15-2:30	Johnstone Rd. SG, DG
March 15	22	3:00-3:15	Surfside Dr W. SG
March 16	616	1:30-1:45	Rathtreavor. DE
March 20	2000+	2:00-4:00	PV Bay to French Creek. Huge raft of 20k+ divers w/ many Brant mixed in all feeding from French Creek Marina to PV Bay. We witnessed a 'disturbance to migratory waterfowl' by small boat that drove into raft causing panic flight by most birds in raft which lasted over 20 minutes. Incident reported to DFO. Three call backs on the disturbance from DFO, Coast Guard & Environment Canada. Photos & details of incident sent to EC. SG, DG
March 21	226	2:15-2:30	Area 2. SG, DG
March 21	63	2:45-3:00	French Creek mouth. SG, DG
March 21	326	3:15-4:00	PV Bay W. SG, DG
March 27	45	1:15-3:00	Surfside Dr. 3 well behaved dogs off leash. TW, RW for Beached Bird Survey.
March 28	375	12:45-1:00	Rathtreavor. SW.
Apr 4	311	1:30-1:45	Rathtreavor. SW.
Apr 7	785	11:00-12:15	Quick full length count of PQBWMA. Rathtreavor -785. PV Bay -0. Johnstone Rd -0. QB beach -0. LQ River estuary -0. SG, DG

Date 2019	Incidental Brant counts	Time daylight hrs	<p align="center">TABLE 2: INCIDENTAL BRANT COUNTS continued</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>
Apr 10	650+	2:30-5:00	Rath Trevor. Low 4' tide with Brant feeding on back of gravel bar where they are well hidden. Brant spooked repeatedly as many walkers who push birds along waterline. Dabblers, gulls, 1 GBHE. 4 dogs off leash. SG, DG.
Apr 14	750	11:30-11:45	Mariner Way. 150 well offshore. 600 flying from N into Rath Trevor. JG
Apr 15	320	9:30-9:45	Rath Trevor. DH for Coastal Waterbird Survey.
Apr 17	380	1:00-1:30	LQ River estuary. Brant well- hidden on back of gravel bar. 225 wigeon, 150+ Bonaparte's Gulls, 1 Long-billed Curlew. SG, DG
Apr 19	2	1:45-2:00	Columbia Beach. SG
Apr 21	320	2:30-2:45	Rath Trevor. DC
Apr 24	450-500	3:30-5:30	Madrona Pt. Views of Craig Bay & back of gravel bars off Rath Trevor. Brant spooked by walkers pushing along waterline. 3 dogs off leash. SG, DG
Apr 26	96	4:00-4:15	LQ River estuary. Brant well -hidden on back of sand bars JG
Apr 28	32	2:00-2:15	LQ River estuary. RS
Apr 30	200	3:00-3:15	Rath Trevor. DC

Brant Count 2019 - Summary of observations

Brant count volume for 2019

-All Brant counted during the 12 primary counts =10,669

-6 peak counts = 1074 + 994 + 1024 + 2121 + 1475 + 1053 = 7741

-Regressed volume 2019 = 5586 (7741 x 0.067 + 400). Method courtesy of Sean Boyd of Environment Canada.

-Regressed volumes 6 peak counts:

2015 = 9091

2016 = 4710

2017 = 12,202

2018 = 12,693

2019 = 5586

Disturbances to wildlife are highlighted in Table 1: Primary Counts 1-12, and in Table 2: Incidental Brant Counts.

Disturbances to feeding Brant in the PQBWMA have been mostly due to dogs on or off leash, walkers who follow the water line where most birds are feeding, eagle flights and generally human presence. Observed dog related disturbances were fewer this year than in 2018. Public awareness due to increased visible signage may be a factor influencing locals to respect the 'dogs off the beach' restrictions. 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.

SEE PAGE 5: Incidental March 20, 2019 re detail of a reported 'disturbance to migratory waterfowl'.

Mileage and total hours of observation:

From the centrally located starting point round trip mileage averaged 64 km for each Primary Count. Total mileage includes all observers' round trip mileage from home to the central starting point.

-The total mileage for the twelve Primary Counts was approximately **2383 km**.

-Incidental counts were varied and no mileage was recorded.

-Coordinating and compiling - **36 hours**

-**Total person-hours of observation for all Brant Count observations is approximately 240 hours (primary counts -197 hours + incidental counts -43 hours)**

Key to observers initials used in Tables 1 and 2: SG=Sandra Gray, DG=Dan Gray, LB=Lynne Brookes, SW=Sue Wilson, CS=Claire Summers, HD=Helen Davidson, TC=Tom Constable, EC=Evelyn Constable, TW=Toni Wyckoff, RW=Ron Wyckoff, BM=Bonnie Mullin, FVM=Frank Van Manen, JG=Jim Goodwin, DE=Dave Erickson, RS=Roger Simms, JT=Jane Towill, PJ=Pat Jacobson, DG=Derrick Grimmer, AK=Al Kirkley, BA=Barry Avis, HA=Hilary Avis, DH=David Helem, DC=Duncan Campbell.

A huge THANK YOU to all volunteer observers from the Arrowsmith Naturalists.

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