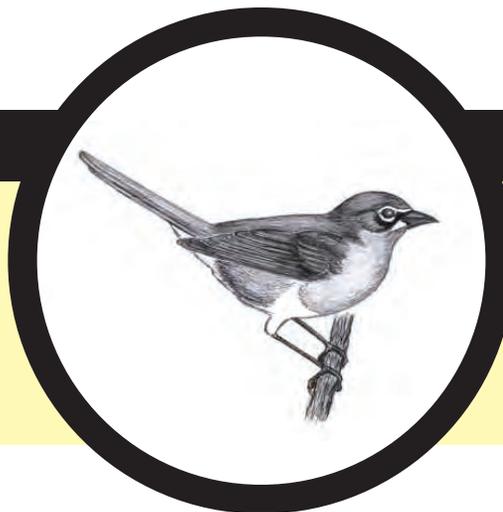


# The Chat

Vol. 119, No. 6 • November / December 2016



## The 117th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts

by Jay Stenger

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a long-standing program of the National Audubon Society, with over 100 years of citizen science involvement. It is an early-winter bird census, where thousands of volunteers across the U.S., Canada and 19 countries in the Western Hemisphere, go out over a 24-hour period to count birds. Over 2,300 individual counts were conducted and over 71,000 people participated last year.

Count volunteers search for birds within a designated 15-mile (24-km) diameter circle while counting every bird they see or hear throughout the day. It's not just a species tally; all individual birds are counted, giving an indication of the total number of birds within the circle that day. If observers live within a CBC

circle, they may arrange in advance to count the birds at their feeders and submit that data to the count compiler. All individual CBC's are conducted during the period beginning December 14th through January 5th each season, and each count is conducted during one calendar day.

CBC participants are organized into groups or field parties by the compiler of the count. Each field party covers a prearranged and specific area within the 15-mile diameter count circle. And everyone is welcome and encouraged to participate regardless of one's birding skills. Compilers arrange field parties so that inexperienced observers are always out with seasoned CBC veterans. You don't have to commit to the whole day either. You are welcome to participate for as long as you like; a half-day or even just a



Carolina Chickadee Photo by Allan Claybon.

few hours would be great. If you live within a count circle you can choose to stay home and count the birds at your feeders.

The data collected by observers over the past century allow researchers, conservation biologists, and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations

*continued on p. 3*

# Carbon Emissions

by *Chris Moran*

The Clean Power Plan is a set of regulations to cut carbon pollution from existing power plants. States are to collectively curb their carbon emissions with carbon cutting targets based on the amount of greenhouse gases released in generating electricity in 2012.

Flexibility in meeting the targets is part of the plan. While some states were implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions,

27 states challenged the regulations and the Supreme Court put the plan on hold until the legal issues were resolved. Recently a federal court heard oral arguments. There is no schedule for when the decision will be announced and the decision could lead to more legal action.

With the upcoming November election, there will be a new President, newly elected or reelected Congressional representatives and Ohio legislators. Once you have

voted, follow the actions of those who were elected and establish a contact.

Contact your newly elected representatives and offer congratulations on the election. Inform them of you support for reducing carbon emissions and increasing the mix of renewable sources of generating power.

[www.usa.gov/elected-officials](http://www.usa.gov/elected-officials)



# Christmas Bird Counts *continued from p. 1*

have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. The long-term perspective made possible by the Christmas Bird Count is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat – and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

The first CBC was done on Christmas Day of 1900 as an alternative activity to an event called the “side hunt” where people chose sides, then went out and shot as many birds as they could. The group that came in with the largest number of dead birds won the event. Frank Chapman, a famed ornithologist at the American Museum of Natural History and the editor of *Bird-Lore* (which became the publication of the National Association of Audubon Society’s when that organization formed in 1905) recognized that declining bird populations could not withstand wanton over-hunting, and proposed to count birds on Christmas Day rather than shoot them.

There are many Christmas Bird Counts to choose from and we encourage you to take part in as

many as possible. But we also hope you can find the time to participate in at least one of our local Christmas Bird Counts listed below. If you have any questions concerning a particular count feel free to contact that count’s compiler.

For more information on Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts visit the following website: <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>.

**\*Note: All National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts remain FREE.**

---

## Local Christmas Bird Counts

*(Endorsed by the Audubon Society, Cincinnati Chapter)*

### **Ohio River “Oxbow” Christmas Bird Count (29th Annual)**

Saturday, December 17, 2016

Compiler: Jack Stenger, (513) 503-3389, [jackstenger@gmail.com](mailto:jackstenger@gmail.com)

### **Hamilton–Fairfield Christmas Bird Count (97th Annual)**

Saturday, December 17, 2016

Compiler: Mike Busam, (513) 259-3262, [mbusam@gmail.com](mailto:mbusam@gmail.com)

### **Western Hamilton County Christmas Bird Count (50th Annual)**

Sunday, December 18, 2016

Compiler: Ned Keller, (513) 349-3369, [nedkeller49@gmail.com](mailto:nedkeller49@gmail.com)

### **Cincinnati Christmas Bird Count (69th Annual)**

Monday, December 26, 2016

Compilers: Jay Stenger, (513) 522-8147, [jaystenger@cinci.rr.com](mailto:jaystenger@cinci.rr.com)  
Jack Stenger, (513) 503-3389, [jackstenger@gmail.com](mailto:jackstenger@gmail.com)

### **East Fork Christmas Bird Count (33rd Annual)**

Monday, January 2, 2017

Compiler: Joe Bens, (513) 353-4229, [joebens@live.com](mailto:joebens@live.com)

For more information on Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts visit the following website:

[www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count](http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count)

## Field Trips (contributed by Jay Stenger)

---

### Saturday, Nov. 12th 8 a.m.

**Theme:** Waterfowl & Late Fall Migrants

**Location:** Brookville Lake Area

**Leader:** Jack Stenger, (513) 503-3389, jackstenger@gmail.com

**Meet:** 8 a.m. at the Park & Ride Lot at I-275 Exit # 7

**\*NOTE: This field trip will be conducted jointly with the Audubon Society and the Cincinnati Bird Club.**

The focus of this trip will be the fall waterfowl migration, which should be near peak at this date. Our trip leader plans to visit several spots around Brookville Lake and then make the short hop over to Hueston Woods before returning home. Both of these locations are hotspots and are excellent for attracting waterfowl and water birds at this season. The rural countryside surrounding these two large lakes has diverse habitats so we expect to find a great variety and diversity of species throughout the day. In addition to many species of waterfowl we also expect to see loons, grebes, gulls, Sandhill Cranes, late shorebirds (such as Dunlin & Wilson's Snipe), Bald Eagles, many hawks, numbers of seasonal songbirds and much more. Rare species are always possible. Prairie Falcon and Golden Eagle have been seen on this trip in recent years.

This will be an auto type tour and will consist of driving from spot to spot interspersed with a few short easy walks. While the trip duration

is long and does entail a lot of driving, the rewards, in terms of what we see, always make it worth the effort.

The trip will run into mid afternoon but of course you can leave at any time you like. Bring your lunch and drinks. It always seems colder around large lakes so dress accordingly. If you have a scope it will prove useful. Restrooms will be available. One important note, Indiana State Parks charges a daily per car entrance fee (\$5 resident, \$7 non-resident). At this time of year there are usually no attendants on duty but we cannot be sure of that.

**Directions:** We will meet at 8 a.m. at the park & ride lot, located right at the I-275 Exit # 7 at SR 128 marked Cleves-Hamilton. This is the first exit just west of the Great Miami River at Miamitown. We will caravan from there to the Brookville area, about a 30-minute drive. Call or email Jack if you have any questions.

**Visit the Brookville Lake website at:**

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2961.htm>

**Visit the Whitewater Memorial State Park (at Brookville Lake) website at:**

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2962.htm>

**Visit the Hueston Woods SP website at:**

<http://parks.ohiodnr.gov/huestonwoods>

### Sunday, Nov. 27th 8 a.m.

**Theme:** Late Fall General Nature & Bird Walk

**Location:** Otto Armleder Memorial Park

**Leader:** Chris Moran, (513) 481-6058, vstlib@yahoo.com

**Meet:** 8 a.m. in the main parking lot near the restrooms at Armleder

Armleder Park is jointly managed by the *Great Parks of Hamilton County and Cincinnati Parks*. The Park has a variety of habitats which include open meadows, brushy edges and a wooded riparian corridor located along the Little Miami River and Duck Creek. These habitats attract a diversity of birds and other wildlife. Late autumn is a beautiful time of the year and the subtle hues of the landscape interspersed with fall colors offer up a stark beauty. So come out and join our trip leader Chris Moran for what should be an invigorating morning afield. Chris is a veteran birder and knowledgeable naturalist and is the Secretary and Conservation Chairperson of our local Audubon Society. She is a regular visitor to Armleder and knows the area very well.

While the focus of this trip will be on the seasonal diversity of bird species we expect to find, Chris has varied interests in other aspects of nature and she will not ignore other wildlife and the flora of the area. We expect to see several raptors, including Northern Harrier, numerous sparrow species and other winter songbirds.

## Field Trips *(continued from page 4)*

Because of its location on the Little Miami River, near its confluence with the Ohio River, finding waterfowl and other water birds is always a possibility at Armleder.

This trip will consist of walking various trails for a few hours but the terrain is generally level. Some trails may be muddy so where appropriate footwear. Restrooms are available in the Park. Waterfowl migration will be near peak on this date and Chris may decide to make a side trip to a

nearby spot to improve our chances of seeing ducks and other water birds. Depending on unforeseen factors this trip will run until about noon. Don't hesitate to contact Chris if you have any questions.

**Directions:** Otto Armleder Memorial Park is located at 5057 Wooster Pike Cincinnati, OH 45226. To get to Armleder Park from I-71 N or S; take Red Bank Road (exit 9) onto Red Bank Expressway toward Fairfax. Continue onto Red Bank Road, Right onto

Wooster Pike. Armleder Park is about 1.4 miles on the left.

**Visit the Great Parks Otto Armleder Park website at:**

<http://www.greatparks.org/parks/otto-armleder-memorial-park-recreation-complex>

**Visit the Cincinnati Parks Otto Armleder Park website at:**

<http://www.cincinnati-parks.com/river-parks/otto-armleder-park/>

## Programs

# Diurnal raptors of southwest Ohio

November's meeting is all about the diurnal raptors (hawks and their relatives) of southwest Ohio. Our speaker will be our president, Ned Keller, who is a long-time birder and raptor enthusiast. The program will include identification tips, but will also focus on raptor biology and ecology.

General field guides tend to emphasize field marks, but field marks play a relatively minor role in the identification of raptors, particularly while they are in flight. Shape and flight style are much more important, and Ned will emphasize those identification techniques. He will also look at how raptors hunt,

what they hunt, habitat, and migration timing.

The meeting will be held on **Monday, November 21** at the Winton Woods Visitor Centre, located at 10245 Winton Road. We meet at 7 p.m. for light refreshments and socialization, and the program gets underway at 7:30. To reach the

visitor center, take Winton Road south from I-275, and turn right into the park just before the lake; or from Cross-County Highway, take Winton Road north and turn left into the park just past the lake. A park district auto sticker (\$3 daily or \$10 annual, good through 2017) is required.

**There will be no *December* Audubon Society program. Instead we encourage all members to join us in the annual Christmas Bird Counts. (See article on pages 1 & 3)**

# Satellite Data Helps Migrating Birds Survive

*By Kate Ramsayer*

NASA Goddard Earth Science

This fall, birds migrating south from the Arctic will find 7,000 acres of new, temporary wetland habitat for their stopovers in California. The wetlands – rice fields shallowly flooded for a couple weeks after the harvest – are courtesy of a project that combines citizen science, conservation groups and imagery from Landsat satellites, a joint NASA and U.S. Geological Survey program.

The BirdReturns program, created by The Nature Conservancy, is an effort to provide “pop-up habitats” for some of the millions of shorebirds, such as sandpipers and plovers, that migrate each year from their summer breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada to their winter habitats in California, Mexico, Central and South America. The route takes the birds along what’s called the Pacific Flyway, where they seek out the increasingly rare wetlands teeming with tasty insects to fuel their long-distance flights.

The problem – more than 90 percent of the natural wetlands in the Central Valley of California have been lost to development, agricul-

ture and other land use changes, said Mark Reynolds, lead scientist for The Nature Conservancy California Migratory Bird Program. The organization operates the BirdReturns program, with partners including Point Blue Conservation Science, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

“The challenge is how do you help wildlife that move around and create habitat in places that may only be important for a few weeks or a few months out of the year?” Reynolds said. “We’d long been searching for spatial data that could help us.”

### **Pop-up habitat**

The solution involves big data, binoculars and rice paddies. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird program collects on-the-ground observations, including species and date spotted, from bird watchers nationwide. With a recent NASA grant to Cornell, scientists created computer models to analyze that information and combine it with satellite remote sensing imagery from Landsat and the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer instruments on NASA’s Terra and Aqua satellites. With these models, they could identify areas in the Central Valley where birds

flocked to during the spring and fall migrations, as well as estimate the number of birds making the journey.

“The challenge then was to better understand the status of the habitat, where the models were predicting we should have birds,” Reynolds said. Some of his colleagues had been using Landsat images to look at where – and when – there was standing water, to assist with surveys of shorebirds.

Matthew Reiter, a quantitative ecologist with the conservation science nonprofit Point Blue, based in Petaluma, California, worked on developing models that can classify habitats based on Landsat imagery. For the BirdReturns project, the team analyzed 1,500 Landsat scenes between 2000 and 2011, and then additional images from Landsat 8 after its 2013 launch. For each area not blocked by clouds, they classified whether there was surface water.

Matching the location and timing of surface water from Landsat with the route and timing of migrating shorebirds from eBird, the BirdReturns program looks for those key sites where extra water would make a difference for the

birds, which forage for food in the wetland areas.

That's where farmers come in. Rice farmers in California's Central Valley flood their fields post-harvest, to soften the stubble and make it easier to clear for the next year. Using a reverse-auction, the farmers submit bids to The Nature Conservancy, stating how much money per acre it would take for them to shallowly flood their fields for a few weeks to create these pop-up wetland habitats. The BirdReturns team examines the bids, compares them to the priority habitats, and then makes selections, paying farmers to flood fields for specific two-week periods.

This fall, 30 farmers applied water on approximately 7,000 acres of rice fields. It's the fourth round of auctions; about 30,000 acres of cumulative habitat was created earlier through auctions in Spring 2014, Fall 2014 and Spring 2015. In Spring 2014, the group surveyed the participating fields, as well as control fields where the water wasn't left on. They found that more than 180,000 birds of over 50 different species used the 10,000 acres of pop-up wetlands – 30 times more than counted on the dry fields.

“It's been a pretty astonishing



American Avocet Photo: Allan Claybon

success,” Reynolds said. “Farmers participated, and we were able to put habitat out there at a fraction of the cost to purchase that land or put an easement on it.”

### **Mapping water**

With an ongoing drought in California, which is drying up some of the state's wildlife refuges, it's even more valuable to have a program like this, he said. If farmers have the water to create the habitat, it could compensate for dry areas elsewhere along the route.

With Landsat's free archive of decades of land cover information, the mission has often been used for habitat and biodiversity studies, said Jeff Masek, project scientist for the upcoming Landsat 9 mission. With the currently in orbit Landsat 7 and Landsat 8 capturing more images per day than previous satellites, scientists have more information to draw on to study the timing of

the ephemeral lakes, rivers and wetlands that only appear certain times of year.

“There's been more and more work with the water mapping,” Masek said. “You can start to do much more detailed studies of the seasonality of water – when these lakes fill in, and when they dry up.”

The freely available satellite imagery from Landsat, and other satellite instruments such as the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer, are invaluable data resources to see how birds and other animals are affected by landscape changes, Reiter said.

“With applied conservation programs, we're using that imagery to say here are the areas that we can prioritize for conservation management, and here are areas that maybe we can let go,” he said. “It's a very powerful tool for getting conservation to happen.”



## Audubon Society of Ohio

3398 W. Galbraith Rd.  
Cincinnati, OH 45239

513-741-7926 (SWAN)  
mail@cincinnati.audubon.org

**President**

*Ned Keller*

**Vice President**

*John Stewart*

**Treasurer**

*Jay Stenger*

**Secretary**

*Chris Moran*

**Communications**

*Ned Keller*

**Programs**

*vacant*

**Field Trips**

*Jay Stenger*

**Preserves**

*Jim Mundy*

**Newsletter**

*Mark Gilsdorf*

**Member-at-Large**

*Harris Abramson*

**Member-at-Large**

*Richard Amable*

**Member-at-Large**

*Penny Borgman*

**Member-at-Large**

*Brian Keane*

Our mission is to promote the conservation and appreciation of nature for environmental sustainability with a focus on birds, through habitat protection and education

## Become a Friend of the Audubon Society of Ohio

---

Membership form for the Cincinnati Chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Enclose a check or money order payable to "ASO."

Membership:  1 Year (\$15)  Family (\$25)  Additional Contribution

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (cell): \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to:**

ASO

3398 W. Galbraith Rd.

Cincinnati, OH 45239

*Your information will not be shared with any other group*