



American Kestrel © Lana Hays

the passenger
Pigeon



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The 112th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts

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Northern Bobwhite © Lana Hays



There will be no monthly Bird Club meeting in December. Instead members are encouraged to participate in one or more of the Christmas Bird Counts.

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 US, Canada and 19 countries in the Western Hemisphere, go out over a 24-hour period to count birds. Last years count set an all-time high with 2,215 individual counts conducted. Those counts included a record total of over 61,000 participants.

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 those 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 ones 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 a few hours

There is a \$5.00 fee per field participant per count. Feeder watchers are free, as are all observers 18 and under. These fees help to cover the costs of generating materials for compilers, producing an annual CBC summary issue, and maintaining the CBC website and database.

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 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.

There are many Christmas Bird Counts to chose 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 counts compiler.

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

-Jay Stenger

Count 'em all

The main purpose of a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is not to have fun, yet when done right, CBCs are by far the most rewarding form of birding. In fact, I enjoy CBCs more than any type of birding: more than a red-letter day of May migration, more than a day of birding in the Rio Grande. And I'm not just saying that. My reasons are many, but one of them is the satisfaction that comes with contributing to important citizen's science in an effective way.

Like birding, there are many ways to approach a CBC. On one end of the spectrum there are birders who hike miles of trail-less, mushy river bottoms and only see their car a few times during the day. And then there are feeder watchers who sleep-in and check their home feeders once an hour while sipping hot toddies and wearing a slanket. And there are many people in between, all of which are necessary for a successful count. Nobody has to bird outside their comfort zone. But despite this diversity there is still a correct way to do a CBC.

The correct way lies in distinguishing the difference between a normal day of birding and a day of Christmas counting. In a normal day, the goal is usually to see "cool" birds and cover the best areas to find these birds. On a CBC the goal is to cover every inch of your area and accurately count the birds, even the common ones, within it. The fun lies not in the cards you are dealt, but how you play them.

On a CBC, you will not be birding hotspots all day long. All CBCs take place in a 15-mile diameter count circle. That is about 177 square miles of area to count. Sounds like a lot, right?

We'll consider the fact that most of the Cincinnati CBC is developed or private land which birders cannot access. And remember that you will be sharing the area with about 100 other birders. This is why it is important to cover a small area very well instead of large areas cursorily.



This challenge, finding birds in unconventional areas, is part of the fun. My favorite areas on local counts include a field behind the Milford Walmart, Rumpke Dump, a graffitied railroad spur, an overgrown Christmas tree farm, and a degraded honeysuckle hedge in Winton Woods that has yielded Fox Sparrow and Brown Thrasher for two straight years. There are ways you can squeeze the most out of these areas that are ignored for the other 364 days in a year.

Go slow. There is no rush on a Christmas Bird Count. Be thorough and leave no bush un-pushed. Take joy in finding every bird you can in a small area. If you bird an area and are surprised to miss expected species, bird it again later. For example, there is a pine stand in your area that you know harbors Red-breasted Nuthatches. If you can't find nuthatches in the morning, visit

again in the afternoon and take your highest count for each species. From a scientific perspective, thorough coverage yields data that more accurately estimate bird populations. If you are covering areas hastily you will only detect a fraction of species present, which yields incomplete data fraught with biases.

Bird roadsides. There is very little public green space in most count circles. Because of this we have to get creative. One way to do this is to utilize roadsides. If at anytime throughout the day you see a safe, wide pull-off or parking lot that is near any sort of vegetation, pull into it. At the very least step out of your car and spend a few minutes birding nearby. If the area seems birdy and the roadside seems safe, take a little stroll.

Document unusual sightings. If you are lucky enough to find a rare species or unusually large concentration of common birds, spend time getting detailed looks and documentation. Take notes on field marks and numbers. If you have a camera take a picture. All this information will be used later to support your sighting.

Enjoy it. Don't worry that you're not birding the best area in the circle; you can visit those areas any other day of the year. Take pride in the thoroughness of your surveys. And pat yourself on the back for contributing to a rich birding tradition that supports conservation, science, and the local birding community.

I'll see you then.

-Jack Stenger

CINCINNATI CHRIST

The 65th Cincinnati Christmas Bird Count

Monday, December 26th, 2011

The 65th annual Cincinnati CBC will be conducted on Monday, December 26th, 2011. Not only are you invited to participate, but you are also needed.

Over the years, the Cincinnati count has often led all NAS counts with the highest number of individual species including Downy Woodpecker (24 times), Tufted Titmouse (18 times), Northern Cardinal (34 times), Carolina Wren (17 times), and Carolina Chickadee (34 times).

I encourage everyone to participate in this season's Cincinnati CBC and help us keep this great community birding tradition strong. CBC's are a wonderful way to spend a day with old and new friends. Everyone is welcome from beginner to expert and regardless of skills.

You can participate in many ways. If you can bird an entire day, that's great. But if you can only do half of a day or even just a couple of hours, that's great too. Or, if you live within the count circle, you can also stay home and count the birds at your feeder and in your yard. Remember feeder counters and people aged 18 and younger are free. If you're concerned about any personal limitations rest assured that you won't be expected or asked to do anything outside your comfort zone. Just remember that Christmas Counts are as much about having a good time as conducting a bird census.

At the end of the day section leaders and most participants head to the Cincinnati Nature Center where we hold a Grand Tally in a festive party atmosphere. I highly recommend attending as this is when we find out the day's results and surprises and share in the camaraderie of a day well spent.

Join us for what is a great Cincinnati holiday birding tradition. We need you to help. Please contact me if you have any questions or to register.

Jay Stenger
Cincinnati CBC Compiler
513-552-8147
jaystenger@cinci.rr.com

Cincinnati Christmas Bird Count (65th Annual)

Monday, December 26th, 2011
Compiler: Jay Stenger, (513) 522-8147, jaystenger@cinci.rr.com

W. Hamilton Cty. Christmas Bird Count (46th Annual)

Sunday, December 18th, 2011
Compiler: Ned Keller, (513) 941-6497, keller@one.net

East Fork Christmas Bird Count (29th Annual)

Monday, January 2nd, 2012
Compiler: Joe Bens, (513) 353-4229, joebens@live.com

Ohio River Christmas Bird Count (25th Annual)

Saturday, December 17th, 2011
Compiler: Paul Wharton, (513) 353-3403, pwharton@fuse.net

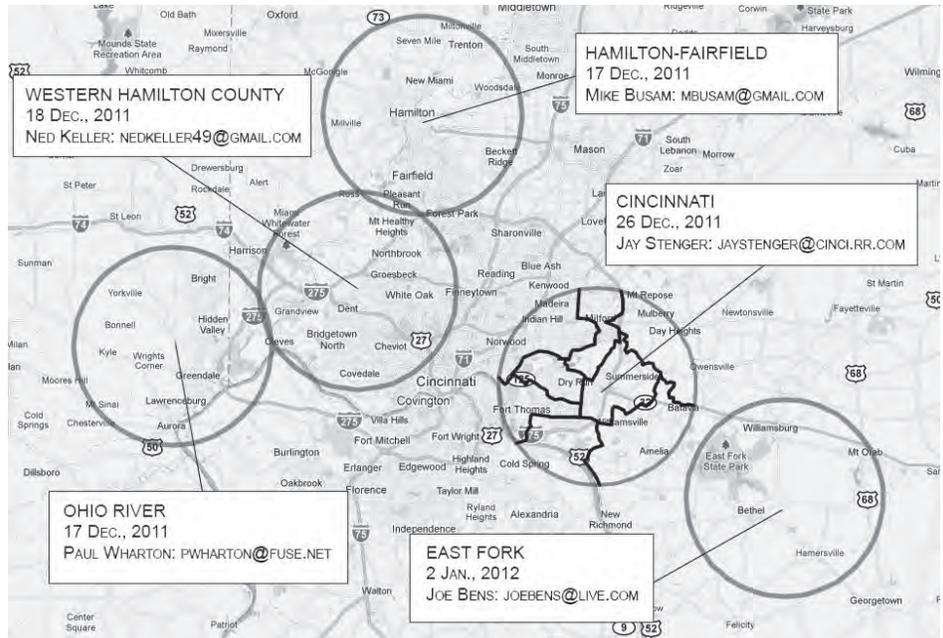
Hamilton-Fairfield Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 17th, 2011
Compiler: Mike Busam, (513) 755-0057, mbusam@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS



Carolina Chickadee © Lana Hays



Graphic courtesy of Jack Stenger.

National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts near Greater Cincinnati

Caeser Creek/Spring Valley CBC

Thursday, December 15th
 Compiler: Rebecca Elefante, (513) 897-1050, e-mail: Rebecca.A.Elefante@usace.army.mil.

Adams County CBC

Sunday, December 17th
 Compiler: Mark Zloba, (937) 544-2880 x15, e-mail: mzolba@hughes.net

Big Oaks N.W.R. CBC

Sunday, December 17th
 Compiler: Joe Robb, (812) 273-0783, e-mail: Joe_Robb@fws.gov

Oxford, OH CBC

Saturday, December 17th
 Compiler: Larry Sherman, (513) 523-2458, e-mail: shermalw@muohio.edu

Paint Creek CBC

Sunday, December 18th
 Compiler: Steve Wagner, (513) 831-7606

Michaela Farms CBC

Saturday, December 31st
 Compiler: Wayne Wauligman, (513) 922-4430, (513) 680-4447, e-mail: wrwpgw@aol.com

Muscatatuk N.W.R. CBC

Sunday, January 1st
 Compiler: Donna Stanley, (812) 522-4352, e-mail: dstan52@frontier.com

Other winter bird counts

Clermont Cty. Parks Dist. Winter Bird Count

Friday, January 7th
 Contact person: Keith Robinson, (513) 876-9013, e-mail: krobinson@co.clermont.oh.us

Northern Kentucky Winter Bird Counts

Warsaw Winter Bird Count

Saturday, December 17th

Burlington Winter Bird Count

Saturday, December 31st

Falmouth Winter Bird Count

Monday, January 2nd

Contact: Lee McNeely, (859) 586-9200, e-mail: lkmc9@netscape.net

BIRDING YOU CAN COUNT ON

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Accurate counting lies at the heart of a successful Christmas Bird Count. Here are some suggestions to consider when counting birds. If you are confused in the field on how you should count birds, make a note on your tally sheet and seek the opinion of other birders or your section leader. There is no shortage of helpful people on CBCs.

Under-counting is just as bad as over-counting. The purpose of a CBC is to count the birds in your area as accurately as possible. Conservative estimates need not be applied to common birds. For common birds, estimate to the best of your ability, not conservatively. For rare or uncommon birds the same reasoning applies, but it is necessary that you pay these sightings extra attention and try to get as exact of a count as possible.

Count by fives and tens when appropriate. When you encounter large groups of birds count a sub-group of 10 or 50 individuals. Familiarize yourself with what that unit looks like. Then count how many of those units are in the flock. Then multiply. If you count by ones you will go crazy and get an incomplete count before the birds fly away. In some situations, like when birds are constantly moving it can be impossible to count by ones.

Use ratios when appropriate. You encounter a flock of 200 blackbirds. Before they fly you are only able to identify 100 of them: 75 Red-winged Blackbirds, 15 grackles, and 10 cowbirds. If the 100 birds that you don't identify seem to have a similar makeup as the identified birds, I encourage you to proportionately amplify your species counts so they add up to the

total size of the flock. This means you would record your sighting as 150 Red-winged Blackbirds, 30 grackles, and 20 cowbirds. In groups this big it is difficult to count and identify every individual. Use caution with this method.

Don't discriminate against common birds. In recreational birding many birders have conditioned themselves to ignore House Sparrows, pigeons, and starlings. They are birds too and you should count them. If European Starling is not your most common bird for the day, consider paying more attention or visiting a fast food restaurant.

Don't be scared of big numbers if you feel they are accurate. Never lower a number you counted just because it seems high.

Never stop counting. Count all day long. As you drive from place to place keep your eyes peeled. Note the hundreds of starlings on the wire, the few Mourning Doves, the robins in the yards, and the Cooper's Hawk flying over the road. Many species can turn up anywhere, such as blackbirds and raptors.

Don't count chickadees like you count eagles. Imagine that you are surveying the Little Miami River. You see a third year Bald Eagle fly upstream. Ten minutes later you travel one mile upstream and find a third year Bald Eagle perched in a sycamore. You'll probably count this as one bird. This doesn't apply to chickadees! They are everywhere and count them as such. Don't say "that was probably the same chickadee I saw before" because it probably wasn't. Jerome Jackson, the well-known woodpecker

researcher, gave an anecdote about counting Downy Woodpeckers at a presentation I had the pleasure to see. He was home for the holidays in New England and wanted to know how many Downy Woodpeckers were visiting his mother's bird feeders. So, he began banding them. Eighty birds later he was still catching new birds. Think about that for a second. I wouldn't worry about counting common birds twice.

Count vocalizations. At any given time you can only see about 90 degrees. Your ears however, can hear 360 degrees at once, allowing instantaneous counts of vocalizing birds. If you are familiar with the calls of our common birds be sure to count these detections just as you would a sight record. If you are not comfortable with these calls you can still use them by estimating the total number of birds around you. This will provide a framework for your species counts.

Don't get lost in your clipboard. If you made a note for every bird you detected, your eyes would always be on your tally sheet and you would miss more birds than you see. Record your birds about every 15-30 minutes when bird activity is slow.

Counting is fun and informative. I am always surprised when I count every bird I detect. It is amazing how numerous the common birds can be and how uncommon others are in relation. By counting, I gain appreciation for the common birds that I frequently take for granted and learn to cherish the uncommon birds.

-Jack Stenger

TALLY-HO!

During December the Bird Club does not schedule any programs because we focus on the many local Christmas Bird Counts. Note that most counts have a tally at the end of the day. At these tallies, participants gather to add-up bird numbers and share stories from the day of birding.

If you wish to learn about the changing abundance and distribution of local birds and habitats, these tallies are the best possible events to attend. The compilers lead the tally by going through each species normally observed on the count. In response, section leaders give the totals from their sections, which the compiler adds to the grand total. After each species is tallied, the compiler reveals how the current year's total compares to past years. Usually, discussion ensues for unusual birds, high counts, or artfully placed one-liners. My favorite part is the end of the tally, when each group reveals their "write-in" birds, uncommon or rare species that are rarely recorded.

Tallies are also a fantastic way to meet or catch-up with the local birding community. All are welcome, even if you can't participate in the count. The Cincinnati Christmas Bird Count Tally is held at the Cincinnati Nature Center and usually lasts from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on the night of the count. Contact the other compilers for information on respective tallies.

-Jack Stenger



CALLING ALL FEEDER WATCHERS

During the winter, bird feeders draw many birds of multiple species. If you or somebody you know lives in one of the above count circles and maintains a bird feeder, please consider participation in a count. To do so, contact the appropriate compiler. Feeder watchers are an important part to every count because all birds they record are incorporated into the count totals. And they don't have to pay the five-dollar fee. Heck, you don't even need a feeder. You can just walk around your yard. This is a great way to encourage those new to the hobby.

the passenger **Pigeon**



Newsletter of the Cincinnati Bird Club

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2011-2012 Dues:

If you haven't sent in your dues yet for the September 2011 - May 2012 birding season, please fill out the form below and mail it in along with your membership fees.

Visit us on the Web at:

<http://www.cincinnatibirds.com/birdclub/index.php>

Lois Shadix (lshadix@fuse.net), 2928 Saddleback Dr, Cincinnati, OH 45244

Make your check payable to Cincinnati Bird Club, and mail to our Treasurer:

Individual \$12.00 Family \$15.00 Student (under 18) FREE

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