

The Christmas Bird Count

North America's Oldest Citizen Science Project

Before the turn of the 20th century, The Side Hunt was a Christmas tradition that many people participated in. It involved two groups of hunters dividing a field and hunting on the lands on either side of the division. The aim of the hunt was to see how many feathered and furred animals they could kill and retrieve in a given amount of time. The side with the biggest pile won.

Conservation was in its infancy back then but many scientists and observers were beginning to notice a dramatic decline in bird populations. Frank M. Chapman, an ornithologist and officer with the then newly-budding Audubon Society, proposed that instead of killing the birds that they be counted instead, and so began the Christmas Bird Census.

On December 25, 1900, about 18,500 individual birds were counted by 27 participants in 25 different sites. In total, 89 species were counted in the sites ranging from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove California. Since that first census, the Christmas Bird Count, as it is now known, has taken place every year, with thousands of volunteers conducting counts in over 2000 different locations throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Why Birds Matter

Birds not only bring beauty to our backyards and landscapes, they also play a very important role in our environment. They help pollinate plants, disperse seeds, help with insect control, and some even help with natural clean up. Birds are also great indicators of change in our ecosystems. When a species declines rapidly this can be a sign that something is wrong in their environment. Information on the distribution and abundance of a species across its range can help scientists prioritize what steps need to be taken to bring health back to the system.

Why Volunteers Matter—How The Christmas Bird Count Is Conducted

All Christmas Bird Counts are conducted between December 14 and January 5 every year. Each count takes place within a 24km diameter circle, counting every bird you hear or see all day. It's not just a species tally that is taken, but a count of each individual bird that is observed throughout the day. With thousands of boots on the ground, volunteers can collect far more data than the scientists who study birds could ever glean on their own.

Sometimes people are fortunate enough to live within the 24km observation circle and are able to gather data right in their own backyards. In order for their data to be accepted they must register beforehand with the official compiler for the search area as the CBC is an official census. If you don't live within the search circle and want to take part in one of the counts you must also register prior to the count. See details below

What is Done With The Data?

Range wide data like the kind gathered during Christmas Bird Counts is invaluable in preserving species; often ecologists and resource specialists may not realize a species is in decline if they happen to be in a patch of higher quality habitat where the local population is doing well. By sampling across the entire continent, we can gather information about the distribution of species and measure in a fairly consistent manner how abundance is changing.

2015 Christmas Bird Count—When is it Happening?

For those interested in the Bird Count within Pinery we will be starting at 6 a.m. on **Saturday, December 19th** at the Chalet Parking Lot adjacent to the Sassafras Trail.

A day pass to Pinery will be provided for those who are registered and participating in the count.

How To Register

Outside Pinery Park Boundary—Please contact Maris Apse—Kettle Point apsemaris@hotmail.com

Within Pinery Park please drop in at or call the Visitor Centre on weekends @ [\(519\) 243-8574](tel:(519)243-8574) between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. or you can email Sarah Litterick at sallycicada@gmail.com and she will pass your info on to the compiler for Pinery Park.

Christmas Bird Count 101

- Dress for the weather- there are often cold winds coming down Lake Huron, so extra clothes are often required.
- Wear comfortable footwear
- Pack snacks and fluids
- Bring a good pair of binoculars and your camera