



MONTANA AUDUBON

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HUNDREDS OF VOLUNTEERS TO JOIN AUDUBON'S CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT IN MONTANA *Holiday Tradition Yields Data Vital for Conservation*

Helena, Montana, December 11, 2008 - Birdwatchers from Miles City to Libby and Glasgow will spend part of their holiday season far from shopping malls, looking for birds in the great Montana outdoors. The longest running Citizen Science event in the world, Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place between December 14, 2008 and January 4, 2009. Information gathered helps scientists learn more about how birds are faring throughout the state, adding to over a century of data collected by previous generations of volunteers.

“This year marks the 100th year Christmas Bird Counts have been held in Montana,” said Steve Hoffman, Montana Audubon’s Executive Director. “The first count was held on December 25, 1908 in Bozeman.”

“We encourage anyone interested in helping with this effort to contact Montana Audubon,” Hoffman added. “You don’t have to be an experienced birder to participate. We’ll put you in touch with the person leading the count closest to you. That person will then match up newcomers or beginners with more experienced folks.”

The dates for each of this year’s 32 bird counts in Montana are:

- December 14: Big Hole, Billings, Helena, Ninepipe NWR, Park County, Troy, West Yellowstone
- December 15: Chester, Little Rocky Mountains
- December 16: McNeil’s Slough
- December 17: Fort Peck
- December 18: Grant Kohrs
- December 20: Big Fork, Bozeman, Clark Canyon Dam, Eureka, Glacier National Park, Great Falls, Hamilton, Libby, Malta/ Bowdoin NWR, Missoula, Upper Swan Valley
- December 21: Roundup, Yellowstone National Park
- December 26: Three Forks
- December 27: Ennis, Stevensville
- January 1: Warm Springs
- January 3: Lewistown
- January 4: Kalispell

CBC schedules, a map of count locations, and contact information for count leaders throughout the state can easily be found at the Audubon web site: www.mtaudubon.org.

With natural areas disappearing at an alarming rate and global warming affecting many key habitats, scientists rely on CBC data to identify birds and habitats in most urgent need of conservation action. "Everyone who takes part in the Christmas Birds Count plays a critical role in helping us focus attention where it is most needed," reports Amy Cilimburg, Montana Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation. "Their observations are the foundation for Audubon's State of the Birds Reports and Audubon's WatchList. These holiday-season counts are tools to inform necessary conservation action and can also reveal good news, such as the return of the American Bald Eagle."

The Christmas Bird Count began over a century ago when the founder of Audubon magazine, Frank Chapman, changed the course of ornithological history. In 1900, Chapman led a small group on an alternative to the "side hunt," when teams competed to see who could shoot the most game. Instead, Chapman proposed they identify, count, and record all the birds they saw, founding what is now considered to be the world's most significant citizen-based conservation effort.

A Few Facts about Montana's Christmas Bird Counts:

- Oldest annual count: the first count was conducted in Bozeman in 1908
- Youngest count: Big Hole (started last winter).

Last Year's Statistics:

- Most common birds seen last year: Canada Geese (32,336 birds), Mallards (27,973), and Bohemian Waxwings (22,782).
- Count with most species: 91 species were observed on the Stevensville count (Bigfork was second with 89 species).
- Count with least number of species: Only 11 species were observed on the Little Rocky Mountain count.
- Bird species seen in every count: none. However, Black-capped Chickadees were seen in all but 1 count and Bald Eagles and Black-Billed Magpies were seen in all but 2 counts.

If you are interested in finding out about the Christmas Bird Count nearest you, contact Montana Audubon by phone (406-443-3949) email (mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org) or visit their website (<www.mtaudubon.org>).

For free photos, contact Montana Audubon.

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