



Christmas Bird Counts

Birders and nature enthusiasts in Sonora will join people across the western hemisphere and participate in Audubon's longest-running wintertime tradition, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held on December 17 in Sonora. This year, over 2,200 individual counts are scheduled to take place throughout the Americas and beyond from December 14, 2011 to January 5, 2012. During last year's count, about 61 million birds were tallied in 2,215 locations by over 62,000 volunteers, the number of both locations and observers being a record level of participation.



The CBC began over a century ago when 27 conservationists in 25 localities, led by scientist and writer Frank Chapman, changed the course of ornithological history. On Christmas Day in 1900, the small group posed an alternative to the "side hunt," a Christmas day activity in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small mammals. Instead, Chapman proposed that 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 – and a more than century-old institution.

"Audubon and our partners at Bird Studies Canada and the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center rely on data from the CBC database to inform myriad analyses regarding both bird conservation and climate change," says Geoff Le Baron, National Audubon's Christmas Count Director. The data, which are 100% volunteer generated, have become a crucial part of the U.S. Government's natural history monitoring database.

The 112th Count results will be on view at www.christmasbirdcount.org or www.bsc-eoc.org. Explore this information for the winter of 2011-2012 or visit a count from the past. See if and how the state of your local birds has changed during the last 25...50...or 100 years.

For more information about CBC participation, visit Audubon's website at www.christmasbirdcount.org and click on the "Get Involved" link on the right-hand side of the page.

Two CSAS Counts

SONORA December 17

We need anyone who wants to go out and visit Mother Nature for the day. Some groups walk, some drive, and many of us do a combination of both. For information, call Steven Umland at **209-352-6985** or write to him at stevenum71@gmail.com.

CALAVERAS January 1, 2012

Again this year many regulars will be participating in the Calaveras County Count, but we're always interested in encouraging new birders to join us for an enjoyable day followed by a potluck where we share our experiences. As indicated above, we will be doing this on New Year's Day, starting around 8AM with the potluck in Murphys at 4PM. You may wonder, "Why New Year's Day?" The answer is that Audubon National gives us a hard window of Dec 15 – Jan 5 for the count and since we depend on Tuolumne County participants we have to choose a weekend day that doesn't conflict with their counts. Inevitably that means around New Year. I should say that if you're a new birder and not yet sure of your skills in identifying bird species, I'll ensure that you're with an experienced birder so it will actually be a constructive experience for you. If you're interested, email me at barryboulton@earthlink.net.

Additional Local Audubon Christmas Counts

MARIPOSA December 14

Contact Len McKenzie, (209) 742-5579 or email lenmckenzie@yahoo.com for information.

GROVELAND December 15

This circle covers many different habitats including a large portion of Lake Don Pedro, dry chaparral, oak and pine forests, and suburban areas with backyard feeders. A boat will be available on Pine Mountain Lake and Lake Don Pedro. To find out more about this activity, go to <http://www.whzerd.com/grovelandcbc.htm>, or to sign up contact Bill Zachman (209)-962-6689 or send e-mail to whzerd@whzerd.com.

YOSEMITE December 18

Contact Sarah Stock, (209) 379-1435 or send email to sarah_stock@nps.gov for information

More About CBC Counts

Feeder Watchers Needed

If you cannot get out with one of the local teams to assist in the 27th CBC, you can STILL participate! We would like to enlist the help of all of you who have a BIRD FEEDER in the yard. You can sit in the comfort and safety of your own house and record the numbers of birds that visit the feeders you so laboriously maintain. All you have to do is periodically scan the birds who are snacking on the goods you have provided. Keep a tally of those you see and mark the time of day. If your house happens to have a view of a lake or pond such as Phoenix Lake, you can intermittently scan the lake and record what you see. You can then send this information to me and I can include it in the Count. If you have questions please call me, Steven Umland, at 352.6985 or send me an email to stevenum71@gmail.com. WE NEED YOU!

Red Hills Romp with Chinese Camp Elementary Students

On the morning of November 7th, a few Audubon members and I joined with Sheri Betz's 3rd - 6th graders for a bird-seeking amble through the Red Hills.



Using donated and borrowed binoculars, her 14 students got good looks at Northern Flickers, Scrub Jays, Golden- and White-crowned Sparrows, California and Spotted Towhees, Canada Geese, House Finches, Ravens, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and a Red-breasted Sapsucker!

Sheri's enthusiasm is a tremendous gift; her students are indeed now all "birders"! Also along were classroom helpers Olivia LaPertche (an aide) and Christina Stewart (a parent). Audubon enthusiasts John Turner and Angie Wulfow fielded questions and offered encouragement. The intrepid hikers were Erik, Deborah, Colby, Emily, Hannah S., Efrain, Eduardo, Mekhi, George, Isaac, Hannah D., Danielle, Gary, and Christina. We all had a great time on a lovely day!

Pamela Blair, Education Chair

Conservation

Biological Resources Review Guide

The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors has appointed a committee to review and revise the Biological Resources Review Guide, originally adopted by the County in 1987 in the form of a Wildlife Handbook that was later expanded to include plant species. The Guide provides an alternative to developers so they can avoid having to prepare a separate environmental analysis of their proposed projects. The committee, composed predominantly of representatives of the agricultural and development community, has only one representative from the environmental community, namely Rebecca Cremeen, who is with Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, known as CSERC. The Committee chairman is Supervisor Dick Pland.



The apparent intent of the majority of this committee is to weaken environmental protections and reduce required mitigation measures. One example is for habitat which is classified as Third Priority. Such areas include more of the common habitats such as blue oak/gray pine, Sierran mixed conifer and chaparral. The existing Guide requires that 20% of the total area be preserved as open space. The majority support applying the 20% Open Space requirement only to the actual Third Priority habitat, rather than to 20% of a parcel that *contains* Third Priority habitat. This would often result in an 80% reduction from mitigation protection. The committee also agreed to allow a project to substitute open space zoning for agricultural zoning (37 acre minimum) as mitigation for impacts to Third Priority habitat, provided that a habitat management plan is approved.

Another contentious issue has been preservation of oak trees and native oak woodland. Current environmental laws and regulations require measures intended to preserve certain oak trees and oak woodlands. However, discretion is left to each county to determine the extent of such measures. Currently the Guide allows a developer to pay a mitigation fee in lieu of actual oak tree preservation. Such fees go to the County's Oak Woodland Conservation Fund. The amount to be contributed is currently determined based upon land value for agriculture uses rather than the usually higher land value of the project for which mitigation is required. Ms. Cremeen and CSERC urged that the mitigation fee be based upon the land value of the project to encourage preservation of the oak trees on the project site. That suggestion was ignored.

Protections for old growth oak are proposed to be reduced. Intrusion of such items as paving and walls into as much as 50% of the area beneath the tree would be allowed, compared to only a 25% intrusion now allowed. Current restrictions against intrusion of the area beyond the tree's drip line would be eliminated.

When all proposed revisions are ready for review by the Board of Supervisors or Department of Fish and Game, Audubon is likely to comment on recommendations which it opposes in the hope that Fish and Game may require more, not less, environmental protection, as part of the Guide.

Tom Parrington, Conservation Chair

Field Trip Report

Cosumnes River Preserve

Sixteen or so of us enjoyed a memorable day of birding at the Cosumnes River Preserve near Lodi where a rich selection of 36 bird species from geese, swans, cranes



and ducks to shorebirds, raptors and passerines entertained us quite royally all day long. Of course, our main intent was to watch the Sand-hill Cranes, to see

them dancing and trilling with that distinctive voice, finally thrilling us as they elegantly circled and swooped through the orange-yellow sunset to land for overnight safety on the wetlands. They did indeed give us all that we wished for, but we were also fortunate in seeing a flock of Tundra Swans and thousands of Cackling Geese, and then one flooded field with hundreds of Canvasbacks. I was also pleased to see a couple of Cinnamon Teal that, although the National Geographic field guide describes as “common”, seems to be greatly decreased in numbers these days. A White- faced Ibis and a fairly bold Greater Yellowlegs appeared – oh, and the pond turtle shown here covered with duck weed. I could go on; suffice it to say we had a great day!

Photo and story: Barry Boulton

Costa Rica Field Trip

I'm communicating with a travel agency in Florida that organizes birding and nature tours in Central/South America



Costa Rican Quetzal

about the possibility of a 6 – 8 day birding trip to Costa Rica in February or March for our group. The agency is organizing such a trip for the San Diego Audubon Society in early March and I then thought that a Central Sierra Audubon trip might be most enjoyable. The land part all-in cost (that is, lodging, food and guide) is likely to be around \$1,200 - \$1,300 for a group of 6 to 10, while the air fare is probably around \$800. If

you're interested email me at barryboulton@earthlink.net and I'll email you a couple of itineraries that they have prepared for San Diego so that you can see if you're interested in taking it further. At this stage no dates or trip details have been discussed until I have an idea of whether we have enough participants.

Upcoming Board Meetings
Wednesday, December 7, 2 PM
Wednesday, January 4, 2012, 2 PM
At Jamestown Community Hall on Main St.
**** Note change from 4th Tuesday to 1st Wednesday****

Your Audubon Board:

Rick Baird, President	532-4323
David Harden, 1st Vice President, Programs	533-1668
Tom Parrington, 2nd Vice President, Conservation	928-3835
Tom Harrington, Secretary	694-8564
Janet Maffei, Treasurer	532-8426
Barry Boulton, Field Trips	795-8225
Jeanne Ridgley, Membership	962-7598
Pamela Blair, Education	533-1668
Kate Sim, Newsletter	728-9022
John Turner, Past President	852-2348

Your Audubon Committees:

Steven Umland, Sightings	352-6985
Suzanne Kilburn, Bird Box Trail	532-1938
Tom Harrington, Book Sales	694-8564
Anthea Neilson, Hospitality	533-0360
Joyce Schieferstein, Scholarships	586-1680



The European kingfisher was sometimes called a halcyon and was prominent in Greek mythology. Halcyone was the daughter of the god of wind, Aeolus, and the wife of Ceyx. Ceyx was tragically drowned on his way to consult the oracle of Apollo, and Halcyone was so grief stricken that she drowned herself in the sea so that she could be near her husband. The gods took pity on this couple and changed them into a pair of kingfishers. Zeus declared that in their honor, the wind should not blow for seven days before and seven days after the winter solstice, December 21. This two week period coincided with the nesting period of the kingfishers, and from that time onward, this time is known as the halcyon days. *The Folklore of Birds, Laura C. Martin*

SIERRA SQUAWKER

Central Sierra Audubon Society

(A Chapter of the National Audubon Society)

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209-532-0570

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December 2011

Christmas Bird counts

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General Meetings

3rd Wednesday (except June, July, Aug. & Dec.)

7 PM, Tuolumne County Library

Board Meetings

1st Wednesday, August through May

2 PM, Jamestown Community Hall

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

To become a member of BOTH the National Audubon Society, with subscription to *Audubon* magazine, and of **Central Sierra Audubon Society**, with subscription to CSAS newsletter, *Sierra Squawker*, complete this form and mail with **check for \$20 payable to National Audubon Society** to:

Jeanne Ridgley, CSAS Membership Chairman, 19353 Pine Mountain Dr., Groveland, CA 95321

*(To become a member of only CSAS, (with subscription to the CSAS newsletter, *Sierra Squawker*, please make your check for \$15 payable to CSAS)*

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