

# Christmas Bird Count

From <https://www.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count-compiler-resources>

In case of inclement weather, please contact Alan Wells 845 519-5866 for directions.

Photography is encouraged, especially to document rarities. Photographs may be uploaded directly to the National Audubon CBC site via [www.christmasbirdcount.org](http://www.christmasbirdcount.org).

## Participants' guide on what data to collect during your Christmas Bird Count

Please talk with your circle compiler or sector leader in advance of the count day for any guidance on which areas to cover, the sequence of your coverage, bird questions.

1. Record every bird seen or heard in your assigned area, and only between midnight and 11:59 pm on your count date.
2. Try to cover your assigned route as thoroughly as possible during daylight hours.
3. Nocturnal birding or "owling" is optional.
4. Record all hours spent watching or listening for birds.
5. Record all miles traveled while watching or listening for birds (see guide to CBC party miles/hours for details).
6. Record each mode of transportation (by foot, by car, etc), and match the mode with # hours and miles for each type.
7. Record hours watching at feeders separately from any birding in the field.
8. Record hours and miles "owling" (nocturnal birding) separately from any birding in the field during count day.

**Give these to your sector leader by the end of your count day.**

**Scouting is not a required part of the preparation of any Christmas Bird Count. However, if one goal of your group is to get the highest species total each season, pre-count scouting can make or break that effort. The early winter bird season is quite variable from year to year, and a bit of time over the week or so before your official Count Date will save valuable time (and potentially frustration) for your field parties on Count Day.**

- *The timing on routes:* While your field parties probably always tend to follow the same route in their section of the circle each season, scouting beforehand can provide them tips about finding reclusive, crepuscular (dusk-loving), or nocturnal birds. In addition, if you learn before count day that a particular marsh or lake is completely frozen or dry (and thus not worth a visit), that could save your participants a valuable few minutes on their busy day.

- *Road conditions:* As with the Breeding Bird Survey, it's best to make a dry run through all your Count's areas prior to your CBC to ensure that no construction areas or bridge outages will hamper your participants' access to their assigned areas

- *Rarities:* Scouting before the Count day may turn up rare, out of range, or out of season species. These could well be your "best birds" during count day, and obviously you'll want to alert your field parties to their presence if any rarities are turned up.

- *Tricky identifications:* Scouting may result in the location of difficult-to-identify birds that could otherwise go unlisted if they are only seen on Count day. Sorting these species out in advance (some shorebirds, gulls, flycatchers, or sparrows for example) can ensure that observers familiar with the species assist with the identification, and will help supply the details that will probably be necessary to satisfy your CBC Regional Editor.

- **How and where to scout:** The weekend before, or during the week leading up to, your Count ideally all your routes should be pre-run. Thickets, marshes, and congregations of birds should be checked for birds of note, and any logistical difficulties uncovered, or good birds found, should be reported to your party leaders and observers. Many times some of your regular observers will be anxious to scout their areas in advance, so don't feel you have to do all the scouting on your own time.

- **Owling:** Scouting for nocturnal species prior to your Count day can be especially helpful to your observers. The CBC period is the time when many species of owls are defining their territorial boundaries, and driving your routes at dusk or dawn may uncover specific locations where owls may be quickly seen or heard by your observers on Count day.

**Count Day:** Your count must be conducted only within one 24-hour calendar day (midnight to midnight). *Birds outside the circle* seen by an observer standing in the circle should not be included in your census data. **Count Hours & Observers:** Minimums of full daylight hours (at least 8 with exception of short daylight areas or pelagic counts) in field with 10 observers are preferred for best annual coverage. **ID by Voice:** Birds may be identified by voice, but specimens or tracks are *cw* (count week) birds (unless you can document the fact that the specimen/track wasn't present in the area earlier than the count day).

**Use of audio:** It's fine to use attractant noise methods (CD, tape, mp3, spishing, imitating bird calls, etc) on CBCs. Since the Christmas Bird Count is not conducted during the breeding season, such attractant activities by CBC participants are not likely to disturb birds any more than a myriad of other things going on at this time of year (such as mobbing a predator, etc). What we do request is that whether tapes are used or not, participants on a given CBC always conduct their field activities in the same way each season. In other words, if a field party usually plays tapes, they should continue to do so from season to season. If a different field party elects not to use attractant measures, it's best for them not to suddenly start one year. If you decide to use audio devices, please use them judiciously.

**Count Week:** is defined as from 3 days before to 3 days after your official count day. Birds seen during this count week period but NOT seen on count day can be recorded in your checklist as "present" and marked in the online checklist with a "cw". Numbers of count week birds are NOT recorded.

### **Observers/Groups**

Observers in the field during daylight are counted separately from nocturnal birders and those observing at feeders. When reporting the minimum and maximum number of parties, remember these include only parties in the field during daylight hours.

**In Field-** Total Number and Minimum/Maximum Number of Parties: To determine the number of daylight parties, use the number of parties that you began the day with as your basic number. If parties further split up during the day, the maximum number in the field at any given time of the day should be reported, and the basic number becomes the minimum. Example: Count Frozentoes, Alaska starts the day with 3 parties. Later, two of these split into two parties each. The compiler records this as Minimum Number of Parties (daylight) = 3 and Maximum Number of Parties(daylight) = 5. Frozentoes, AK also had a group of counters out owling from 4:45 a.m. to 6 a.m., but this party is not included in the Minimum/Maximum Number of Parties.

**At Feeder-**Total Number: Example would be of 4 people feeder-watching for several hours during the day as well, but again, this is not recorded in the daylight party number (it is recorded as observers At Feeders, Total Number).

### ***Party Hours and Distance***

(excludes viewing at feeders and nocturnal birding)

Record a value for all hours and distance fields except for those associated with By Other Transportation. If appropriate, enter a 0 for distance. For example, an owling party may spend 1/2 hour in one spot--resulting in 1/2 hour and 0 miles owling. Party hours and distance (Total Party, By Foot, By Car, and By Other Transportation) are reported excluding feeder hours and nocturnal birding hours and distance. Please round all hours to the nearest quarter-hour, and all distances to the nearest quarter-mile or quarter-kilometer.

**Total Party Hours and Distance:** Totals for Party Hours and Party Miles are calculated automatically on the website. Please make every effort possible to be accurate with these numbers.

### ***By Other Transportation***

For party hours and distance By Other Transportation, you are given a limited choice of methods of transportation. If the exact method is not listed, please select the best approximation. NOTE: It would be unrealistic to report any more Total Party Hours than the Maximum Number of Parties (daylight) times 12, since 12 is the approximate maximum number of daylight hours in December and January. Compilers should make sure to get the breakdown of hours and distance covered by car, foot, and other means of transportation (boat, bicycle, skis, etc.) from the party leaders.

NOTE: Take into account that for a party on foot, it is stretching reality to have traveled--and birded--much more than 1 or 1.5 miles per hour.

### ***Other Time and Distance***

**At Feeders:** The number of hours is obtained by totaling the hours spent at feeders by feeder-watchers taking part in your count. Time spent observing feeders by parties afield should not be included here--they should be included in your field party totals. Hours should be rounded to the nearest quarter hour.

**Nocturnal Birding ("owling"):** For nocturnal birding, report the number of hours spent by all parties in the field during non-daylight hours, rounded to the nearest quarter-hour and for the distance, total up the distance (by foot, car, or other transportation) traveled by those parties, and round to the nearest quarter-mile or quarter kilometer.