

Green and Growing

Written by D. Bruce Bosley, CSU Extension Agent/Cropping Systems

The longest running citizen science survey in the world, Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), will take place from Dec. 14-Jan. 5. Tens of thousands of volunteers throughout North America will brave winter weather to add a new layer to over a century of data.

Local birders are organizing CBCs at Fort Morgan, Sterling and Crook.

Last year's count shattered records. More than 2,100 counts and 60,753 people tallied 2,319 species and 55,951,707 total birds. That's nearly 56 million birds. Citizen Scientists spotted 200 more species than during the previous year's CBC.

Counts take place in all 50 states, all Canadian provinces, plus several Central and South American countries.

Extreme birders will meet to conduct the Crook bird count Sunday, Jan. 2. In addition, 42 CBCs are planned across Colorado.

The Fort Morgan/Weldona CBC will celebrate its 70th anniversary this year. Natural enthusiasts held the first Fort Morgan count in 1923. They held several more in the first half of the 20th century. The count has been run continuously from 1959 on. The Fort Morgan CBC stands as one of Colorado's longest running counts.

The census is becoming the most important monitoring system for biodiversity in the country. Scientists rely on the remarkable trend data of Audubon's CBC to better understand how birds and the environment are faring—and what needs to be done to protect them. Data from Audubon's signature Citizen Science program are at the heart of numerous scientific studies. CBC analyses also reveal the dramatic impact climate change is having on birds across the continent.

Audubon CBC data not only helps identify birds in most urgent need of conservation action; it reveals success stories. The CBC helped document the comeback of the previously

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endangered Bald Eagle, and significant increases in waterfowl populations, both the result of conservation efforts.

Accuracy is assured by having new participants join an established group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher. Count volunteers follow specified routes through a designated 15-mile diameter circle or can arrange in advance to count the birds at home feeders inside the circle and submit the results to a designated compiler.

People with some skill at bird identification are welcome to participate. Several birding teams will be working each CBC. Teams work together to make a coordinated survey of the bird species and to get a count of each species' population within that day's count circle.

Homeowners who attract wildlife in their landscapes with feeders, water and plantings are also welcome to participate.

Please contact me about participating or have questions about the CDC or other cropping systems or natural resource topics at 970-522-3200 ext. 285 at Sterling or 970-542-3540 at Fort Morgan.