

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 to Jan. 5, 2013. 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 Christmas Bird Counts at Fort Morgan, Sterling and Crook.

Last year's count shattered records. A total of 2,248 counts and 63,227 people tallied over 60 million birds. Counts took place in all 50 states, all Canadian provinces, plus 99 count circles in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands.

This year marks the 72nd year for the Fort Morgan/Weldona Christmas bird count. 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.

Christmas Bird Counts revealed the dramatic impact climate change is already having on birds and a disturbing decline in common birds, including the black capped chickadee in Northeastern Colorado.

The many decades of data not only help identify birds in need of conservation action, it also reveals success stories. CBC helped document the comeback of the bald eagle and significant increases in waterfowl populations, both the result of conservation efforts.

Counts are often family or community traditions that make for fascinating stories. 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 (24-km) diameter circle. Each individual Christmas bird count takes place over a single calendar day.

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People with some skill at bird identification are welcome to participate. Several birding teams will be working each Christmas Bird Count. Home-owners who attract wildlife in their landscapes with feeders, water and plantings are also welcome to participate.

I serve as the county compiler for the Weldona/Fort Morgan count and assist with these tasks for the Sterling and Crook counts. Please contact me about participating in any one or have questions about the Christmas Bird Counts or other cropping systems or natural resource topics by my cell phone 970-980-4001 or via email at bruce.bosley@colorado-state.edu.

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