

For Release: IMMEDIATE
Wednesday, December 15, 2010

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DEC URGES PARTICIPATION IN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
Annual Event Runs Through January 5

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) officials are urging wildlife enthusiasts to join thousands of volunteers throughout the United States to take part in the Audubon Society's 111th Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), which began Dec. 14, 2010, and runs through Jan. 5, 2011. The CBC is the longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations.

“Bird enthusiasts, armed with binoculars, spotting scopes, and bird guides, will head out on this annual mission to experience the beauty of wildlife and to make a difference,” said Gordon Batcheller, Chief of DEC’s Bureau of Wildlife. “Each year, volunteers brave snow, wind, cold, ice or rain, often venturing afield during pre-dawn hours, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count, and they have made an enormous contribution to help guide conservation actions.”

Data collected through this effort allows researchers, conservation biologists and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys, such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past 100 years.

“At more than a hundred years running, the annual Christmas Bird Count provides an unparalleled long-term record of early winter bird distributions and abundances and a basis for analysis of range changes across the continent,” said Albert E. Caccese, Executive Director of Audubon New York. “The information gathered by the army of volunteer citizen scientists becomes more valuable each year, and plays a critical role in helping researchers understand the impacts of environmental threats like climate change and habitat loss, and focus conservation efforts where they are most needed.”

Local counts across the state will occur on one day between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5. There is a specific methodology to the CBC, but anyone can participate. The count takes place within “Count Circles,” which focus on specific geographical areas. Each circle is led by a “Count Compiler,” who is an experienced birdwatcher, enabling beginning birders to learn while they assist. Also, those who live within the boundaries of a Count Circle can even stay at home and report the birds that visit their backyard feeders, or join a group of birdwatchers in a local field. “Volunteer counters” can pick the most convenient circle, or participate in more than one count.

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“If you have never been on a CBC before, your first step is to locate and contact your local Count Compiler to find out how you can volunteer,” Batcheller said. To find out where circles are located, when birds in a given area will be surveyed and who to contact to participate in a Christmas Bird Count, visit the National Audubon Society’s web site at: <http://app.audubon.org/cbcapp/findCircles.jsp?start=&state=US-NY&Submit1=Show+Circles>.

The CBC aids bird conservation in New York because it allows for monitoring wintering bird species. For example, the CBC data for owls was used in the publication of the Second Breeding Bird Atlas of New York to provide additional data on trends in the abundance of four owl species.

In addition, the CBC is a good way to introduce beginners to bird identification. With fewer bird species around in winter than at other times of year, it can be easier to learn bird species identification. Birds are also easier to see in the winter thanks to the trees losing their leaves and the general dieback of a lot of the cover that keeps birds well-hidden in spring and summer. Certain birds are found in particular places. Examples include woodcock in wet areas of pastures and the attraction of bluebirds and robins to grape arbors, sumac patches, or other places where wild fruits are located.

More information on the Christmas Bird Count can be obtained from National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count web site (<http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>). For more information on the status of birds in New York, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/271.html on the DEC website.

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