

Count Yourself In for the 2013 Christmas Bird and Mammal Counts!

Rob Warnock, Co-editor, Nature Views, Nature Saskatchewan

In the winter of 2012-13, **over 700 observers** completed **90 Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs)** in Saskatchewan. During the count period, over 113,000 birds of 98 species were counted! Thank you to all participants. Christmas Bird Counts can be a great way to share time with fellow naturalists, both during and at a get-together after the count. We encourage all interested folks to participate in Christmas Bird Counts. This winter will be the 72nd annual CBC in Saskatchewan.

In Saskatchewan, an annual Christmas Mammal Count (CMC) is held alongside the CBC (since 1973) with this winter being the 41st annual CMC. In 2012, 85 CMCs were completed with 3,406 individuals of 38 mammal species recorded during the count period.

Many of the CBC counts are submitted to Bird Studies Canada (BSC) and from there go into the continental Audubon database. This database is used daily by biologists to track bird distribution and abundance, and thus CBC counts submitted to BSC are contributing to bird conservation. The database is freely available to everyone. **Thank you to our CBC compilers for submitting to the Audubon database!**

Therefore, we encourage even more 2013 counts to go into the continental database because submission of counts to the continental database is now FREE! Let's make our volunteer hours (sometimes in frosty weather!) and citizen science count for more by submitting our Saskatchewan results into the continental data pool!

Important and exciting news from Audubon for the Christmas Bird Count program

The CBC is now FREE!

After nearly two years of internal discussions, budget modeling, head-scratching, and intense decision-making by Audubon, two major changes will come to the Christmas Bird Count program effective with the Count in December 2012.

First, the CBC is now a free program. Audubon will no longer charge the \$5 fee for each field participant.

Second, to minimize the effects of the loss of fee income, *American Birds* will no longer be printed on paper and mailed to participants, and Audubon will move to an online delivery of the summary results of the CBC.

For More Information...

To learn where and when Christmas Bird Counts are held and who to contact to participate in your area of interest, please contact Alan Smith, the Saskatchewan Christmas Bird and Mammal Count Coordinator at alanrandi@sasktel.net, or Dick Cannings, CBC Coordinator for Bird Studies Canada, at dickcannings@shaw.ca.

CBC compilers, please submit your Christmas Bird Counts online, and also email or snail mail Christmas Bird and Mammal Counts to Alan Smith. Nature Saskatchewan can help with online submission and any participant costs for counts where this is needed. We greatly appreciate the time, costs and effort donated by all participants!

Christmas Bird Counts – A Long Tradition

From the CBC page on the BSC website:
<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/cbc/index.jsp?lang=EN&targetpg=index>

In 1900, American ornithologist Frank Chapman asked birders across North America to head out on Christmas Day to count the birds in their hometowns and submit the results as the first "Christmas Bird Census." His suggestion has evolved into one of the largest organized birding events in the world, and a holiday tradition during the Christmas season for over 50,000 birders each year. The Christmas Bird Count, as it is now called, is conducted in over 2,000 localities across Canada, the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. These bird observations, collected during one-day field counts within defined circular areas, have been amassed into a huge database that reflects the distribution and numbers of winter birds over time.

For many years, the New York-based National Audubon Society organized the Christmas Bird Count at the continental scale. In 2000, Audubon and Bird Studies Canada (BSC) finalized an agreement that would see BSC partner with Audubon to coordinate counts in this country.

This database can be accessed through the Audubon CBC Database website at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>.

Turning Leaves

Great Weather Contributes to Successful Fall Meet

Jordan Ignatiuk, Executive Director, Nature Saskatchewan



Fall Meet participants on forestry tour lead by Al Balisky and Roger Nesdoly of Mistik Management. Photo by Fraser Hunter.

Attendance may have been only half of the spring meet but for those participating, the program organized and hosted by the Meadow Lake Junior Forest Wardens (a Nature Saskatchewan affiliate) more than made up for the lack of numbers. And the incredible fall weather was an added bonus.

The Meadow Lake Golf Club served as the gathering point for Friday registration. Finger food and refreshments preceded a program outlining Saturday's tours. A photo presentation of the boreal forest by Brenda Rutz followed and the evening concluded with Dean Cattell, Meadow Lake Provincial Park Superintendent, describing the many kilometers of boreal trails developed in the park.

Saturday morning, members gathered at the Woodland Inn to travel by van or personal vehicle to Pagan Lake. Here we were split into two groups, one being led on a forest driving tour by Mistik Management while the other split into two smaller groups to participate in Junior Forest Warden led presentations or a 'voyageur' history and canoeing experience. The forest tour, led by Al Balisky, CEO of Mistik Management, consisted of over 10 stops, portraying various forest management techniques and stages of reforestation. All agreed the presentations were excellent and informative. The Junior Forest Wardens set up three stations to display activities they are taught as part of their outdoor education program; fire starting, tree planting and boreal plant identification and various traditional uses of these plants. Board Member, Vinessa Currie Foster, operator of Clearwater Canoeing, an eco-tourism adventure company, gave a fact filled history of the fur-trade and the 'voyageur' lifestyle followed by a paddle in a voyageur canoe. Vinessa also provided the group with a delicious 'boreal' lunch after which the two split groups traded activities for the afternoon.

A return to the Meadow Lake Golf Club in the late afternoon for a short business meeting, including a resolution and members forum, preceded a banquet. Members were welcomed to Meadow Lake by MLA Jeremy Harrison and Mayor Gary Vidal. The Nature Saskatchewan Volunteer of the year Award was received by Guy Wapple for his many years of compiling and submitting the data from Christmas Bird Counts and Wild About Saskatoon received the Conservation Award for their organization of the week long Nature City Festival. The Blue Jay editors, subsequent to the Fall Meet, chose Alan Dodd for the Cliff Shaw Award (see article in the September 2012 issue of *Blue Jay*). The evening concluded with an inspirational presentation on the Junior Forest Warden Program by Dave Cullen, Chief Warden of Canada, and Roger Madaire, President of the Alberta JFW Association. They viewed the shared passion of the outdoors between the two organizations as an opportunity for collaboration to inspire new generations of naturalists and conservationists.

Forest Birds Improve Coffee Yields

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A study recently published in *Ecology Letters* indicates that protecting forest patches alongside farmlands is a "win-win" – not only for biodiversity, but also for coffee farmers. Experiments conducted in Costa Rica demonstrated that by feeding on the coffee berry borer beetle (coffee's most damaging insect pest), native forest birds can reduce infestation by roughly 50%. Conserving farmland forest cover, and associated biodiversity, provides significant pest control services and financial benefits. The abstract of the article "Forest bolsters bird abundance, pest control and coffee yield" is available on the *Ecology Letters* website at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ele.12173/abstract>.

Obituaries and Tributes

Readers are welcome to submit memorials for family and friends who were involved in Nature Saskatchewan or one of the Local Societies. Memorials should be brief and photos are permitted.