

The 109th Christmas Bird Count:
Citizen Science in Action

Sunday, December 14, 2008

On December 14, 2008 twenty-four folks from the Morgantown area took to the field to census the bird life in the fifteen mile circle centered on the Morgantown airport. During a two week period tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas took part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists went out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

Each of the citizen scientists who annually brave snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation action.

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

The Mountaineer Audubon group this year tallied 76 species of birds and 3436 individual birds. The number of species seen broke all records with the greatest number of species recorded on a Morgantown Christmas Bird Count. Weather is always a factor. This year we had a mild day after a cold spell. The cold weather forced more birds out of the north but the water was still open around Morgantown. Cheat Lake is becoming an increasing important wintering and resting point for migrating waterfowl. Observers recorded twenty-eight different species of birds associated with water. Notable sightings were Tundra Swans, Northern Pintail, Green Winged Teal, Greater and Lesser Scaup, White-winged Scooter, Long-tailed Duck, three kinds of mergansers, Common Loon, Pied-bill Grebe and Horned Grebe.

First species recorded during a Mountaineer CBC were Greater Scaup, Merlin and White-winged Crossbills. The species with greatest numbers were Rock Pigeon (588), Canada Goose (473), Mallard (293), American Crow (268), European Starling (212) and Ruddy Duck (201). Bald Eagles continue to use the rivers around Morgantown in the winters. The following birds only one individual was recorded during the CBC: Galdwall; Canvasback; Bald Eagle; Red-shouldered Hawk; Merlin; Eastern Screech Owl; Winter Wren; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; and Swamp Sparrow. A full report of the Mountaineer Audubon count and all CBCs can be found on-line at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>.

Birders and friends met for dinner after the count to socialize and tally the day's results. Coordinator LeJay Graffious thanks the section leaders: Sue Olcott; Alan Clark; and Norma Venable. The success of the Mountaineer CBC is directly contributed to the number and quality of the observers. Thanks to the following folks for giving a day of their life energy to participate: Klye Aldeinger; John and Vada Boback; Alan, Janie, Christian and Bennet Clark; Gary Felton; Doug Hoehn; Bill and Emile Johnson; Bill Kennel; Hillar Klandorf; Tommy and Willian Lueckel; Phillip Murray; Kathryn Payne; Mike Peters; Susan Schneider; Todd Schnopp; Larry Schwab; Susan Olcott and Norma Venable.

More information can be found on Mountaineer Audubon webpage:

<http://mountaineeraudubon.org/cbc/>