No Monthly Meeting in December

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Christmas Bird Count* Field Trip
Saturday, January 4

7:30 a.m.  Starbucks  (I-45 and Hwy 30)
We’ll gather here to divide into teams and areas
and then go birding.

5:30 p.m.  City Hall Café  (1421 Sam Houston Ave.)
After a day of birding, we’ll meet here for dinner
to share our experiences.

Bird count tallies will be collected in the field,
at the dinner, or can be emailed to HAS.

All birders are welcome, including beginners,
children, and non-members. New birders can
team up with more seasoned ones.

Bring binoculars, lunch, snacks, water, pen,
and anything else you may need. Dress in layers.

* more details on next page

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Upcoming Monthly Meetings

January 16  Bronwyn Clear on Local Eagles
Texas Master Naturalist, photographer, writer

February 20  Erik Wolf on Edible Plants

Question
Which Mallards are the loudmouths?
   a. males
   b. females

Answer
b. females  The classic, harsh, loud, repetitive
quack-quack-quack is the female Mallard.
Mallard drakes make a deep and raspy, but
softer whak-whak. In most duck species, the
hens are loud and more talkative than the
drakes, who tend to either whisper or be silent.
(No snide comments from the menfolk, please.)

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What is a Christmas Bird Count (CBC)?

It is...

• free
• an **annual day-long local outing** around the Christmas season in which participants count birds
• a 23-day period between December 14-January 5; your local count is on one of these days (**Jan. 4**)
• organized and overseen by the National Audubon Society; they tally all the bird counts afterward
• the longest-running citizen science effort in the world

Participants...

• don’t need any previous birdwatching experience
• are a group of volunteers that count birds in a designated 15-mile diameter zone called a Circle
• divide into smaller groups in order to cover their Circle in one day
• count every bird seen or heard throughout the day including common and invasive species; remember, on the CBC it isn’t the variety of species, but the quantity of species that matters most (see page 3 for instructions on how to count flocks)
• can drive, walk, sit or alternate these activities
• are organized by one compiler who tallies the counts at the end of the day and reports it to the National Audubon Society

What is the purpose of the CBC?

Bird counts are compared from year to year to see where bird populations are living and how they’re faring in North America and the neo-tropics. This information helps ornithologists monitor changes in their populations by showing the impact of climate, disasters, pollution, diseases, habitat changes, etc.

How did it get started?

In the late 1800s, Americans thought it was great sport to take part in the Christmas Day Side Hunt. This was a tradition in which the community gathered, divided into two sides, then went out to kill every bird and small animal they could find. At days end, the side with the most dead animals won. Back then, most people were not very conservation minded and believed birds were a limitless resource.

Frank Chapman, an ornithologist and prolific writer, became increasingly alarmed at the destruction. He proposed an alternative: **Why not count birds instead of shoot them?**

We have him to thank for the first CBC held on Christmas Day in 1900. There were only 27 participants in 25 places in the United States and Canada. But conservationists persevered, and the CBC has grown larger with each decade. In the 118th Christmas Bird Count (winter 2017–2018) there were 76,987 participants from the United States, Canada, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands.

The upcoming count will be the 120th Christmas Bird Count.

CBCs continued on next page
Can I participate in more than one?

Absolutely. You can participate in as many as you want.

Texas alone has dozens of CBCs. If you’re traveling anytime during the holidays, participating in a CBC in another part of the state or country would be a great opportunity and experience.

To see a list of the CBCs in Texas and a description of each, visit the Houston Audubon’s website: houstonaudubon.org/birding/Christmas-bird-counts/

(This is not a link. You’ll have to type in the address or google the information.)

On their website, Texas is broken into 7 areas. They’ve made it easy to peruse the various areas. Their website has other good information you may be interested in reading, too, such as the CBC map. On the Texas Christmas Bird Counts page, there is a link to the Nationwide Map of Christmas Bird Counts. Viewing this interactive map makes it very easy to choose an area that you may be visiting over the holidays or close enough to travel to make a special trip. It not only shows all the CBCs but the 15-mile diameter Circle for each one.

What’s in it for you?

It’s a way to ...

• be a citizen scientist for the day
• learn something new
• connect with fellow birdwatchers
• get some exercise, fresh air, and commune with nature
• feel good about contributing to bird conservation
• spend time with the kids/grandkids while teaching them to appreciate the natural world
• spend time with any friend(s) or relative(s) that you invite to go with you
• get out of housework and chores because you have a bona fide excuse to go birding!

Tips on Counting Large Flocks

It’s rather easy to count the individuals in a small flock of about 15 birds even when they’re flying, but impossible to be accurate in large flocks. The best you can do is estimate.

One way is to take a picture and count them, but this may be impractical in the field.

Another way is to count by increments. Take this photo from ebird.org/news/counting-101/

You will count by tens. Make a mental note of the first group of ten. Don’t worry if you’re off by a few; it’s your best estimate. Their technique is “get a sense for what proportion of the flock they (first 10) take up, and then extrapolate by tens through the rest of the flock.”

I’m not very good at guessing the proportion of the flock the first 10 takes up. Is it 10% or 15%, and how do I do the math on 15%? Instead, I apply the circle of the first 10 in my mind’s eye, and then quickly apply that size circle to the flock.

Test yourself by estimating the number of birds in the photo using different methods. The actual number is 118. Don’t worry if you’re off. It’s an estimate!
Other Texas Bird Events

Texas Ornithological Society’s Winter Meeting
The Texas Ornithological Society will be having their winter meeting in the Bryan-College Station area January 16-19, 2020.

The Rio Brazos Audubon Society will host the event which will include field trips, speakers, and workshops. Most of each day is reserved for field trips where you’ll have opportunities to bird a variety of habitats on publicly accessible land as well as private property in 13 different counties. Speakers and workshops are in late afternoons and evenings.

For more information, see their website: texasbirds.org. Click on the Current Newsletter (Fall 2019) in the orange bar. Go to page 2. There is very detailed information on the field trips, speakers, and what to expect in their newsletter.

Registration is now open. Prices increase Jan. 2nd. Registration closes Jan. 9th. If you do not have access to the internet, you may call Judy Kestner at 361-387-7329 or Frances Cerbins at 512-372-9039.

If interested don’t delay in making reservations. Field trips are filling up fast!
(This was reported by someone who recently registered)

FeatherFest Galveston
FeatherFest is Galveston’s birding and nature photography festival held every year in April during spring migration. The upcoming event will be held April 16-19, 2020.

They have a photo-rich website that has a wealth of information that will tell you about this major birding festival. You can search through the smorgasbord of activities to find those of most interest to you and that fits your budget. Registration is now open. Galvestonfeatherfest.com