

Lane County Audubon Society's 2020 Eugene Christmas Bird Count

By Dick Lamster, Count Coordinator

In late September, the National Audubon Society notified all 2,646 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Coordinators that they would allow CBCs, but only under strict COVID guidelines. These included social distancing, masks, no carpooling except family "pods," and no live Countdowns. They further recommended no sharing of spotting scopes, binoculars, or bird identification books.

I discussed this with all 27 Team Leaders, and everyone agreed that we could do this. It would really be somewhat easy for us, as we have been doing all of this by following the State of Oregon guidelines since the beginning of the pandemic. Not being able to have our traditional Chili Feed Countdown was going to be the most difficult activity to give up.

So, on Sunday, January 3, 2021, we had the 79th Eugene Christmas Bird Count (ECBC). The weather was really good for an Oregon day in early January and we took advantage of it. One Team Leader commented that she needed to add sun screen to her list of items to take on the Christmas Bird Counts! We had 140 people on the 27 Field Teams, plus another 119 Home Counters. That's 259 observers, a new record! The old record of 255 was set in 2012. The combined groups reported an amazing 133 species on Count Day and 74,642 individual birds. A more detailed summary by Species Compiler, Vjera Thompson, can be found on page 3.

The Field Observers walked 155 miles in 196 hours and drove 494 miles in 77 hours. One birder rode his bike for 2.5 hours and 10.5 miles while covering his area. Seven teams went owling for nine hours, covering 16 miles. The 119 Home Counters spent 293 hours looking for birds. They saw 5,988 birds of 64 species.

At the end of the day, we had a Zoom Countdown to replace the traditional Chili Feed. It was certainly not the same, but 55 people tuned in to listen to the Team Leaders give their reports and discuss some unusual birds seen, plus some that we missed. We are all looking forward to the 2021 ECBC and Chili Feed!

A big thank you goes to Marcia Maffei, the new Home Count Coordinator. She did an excellent job of recruiting Home Counters, designing easy to follow procedures, and creating a revised checklist for submitting results more quickly and accurately. Her efforts paid off as we set a new record for the most Home Counters ever at 119. The previous record of 111 was set in 2016.

A big thank you also goes to Vjera Thompson, the Species Compiler. This year she developed a new Excel program which allowed Team Leaders to submit their reports electronically. This made the process easier, quicker, and more accurate.

A third big thank you goes to the 27 Team Leaders who are listed below. They assembled their teams, guided them throughout the day, and then reported the results. Five teams spotted more than 70 species. The top two reported 82 and 83 species. A remarkable effort! The ECBC would not be the great event it is without the work of the Team Leaders.

Speaking of our great efforts, last year we had the 9th largest number of participants of the 2,646 CBCs in North America and Central America. That is a remarkable effort for a small town in Oregon.

I am very pleased that we conducted a safe and very successful 79th ECBC. Thanks to all of you who participated. It was fun!