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Stand up and be a counter

Annual bird tally could use volunteers

By [Byron Stout](#)

Originally posted on December 07, 2006

If you're looking for a new Christmas tradition but you can't carry a tune of a carol in a coal bucket, and you can't bear to chop down a wild tree, how about birding?

The 107th Christmas Bird Count needs you.

"We could use volunteers," said Paul Andrews, president of the Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society.

Participants don't have to be experienced birders, according to Vince McGrath, a 20-year leader of Sanibel-Captiva and Fort Myers counts.

"I've taken a lot of people on my trips. Out here on Captiva, guests come along. Employees come along. It's a lot of fun," said McGrath, the naturalist and tour guide for South Seas Island Resort.

McGrath not only has fun, but also contributes to one of the largest and longest-running databases on birds in the world.

"It is, I think, the single best way to monitor the winter population and distribution of birds throughout the United States. It's called citizen science."

*Andrew West/news-press.com*

Black skimmers take flight at Bunche Beach on Nov. 28. The birds flew along with other shorebirds and pelicans.

[Order Picture](#)**SIGN UP FOR A COUNT NEAR YOU**

- Saturday, Dec. 16
Peace River: Tony Licata (941) 505-9775
alicata@dcwis.com
- Sunday, Dec. 17
Sanibel-Captiva: Bill and Elaine Jacobson (239) 395-1878 mej42@earthlink.net
- Monday, Dec. 18
Fakahatchee: Larry Richardson (239) 393-8442 Ext. 224
Larry_Richardson@fws.gov
- Ft. Myers: Vince Lucas (239) 514-7512 vlucas@swfla.rr.com

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In his two decades of data contributions, McGrath has observed the astounding increase in exotic Eurasian-collared doves in Southwest Florida, and he's also noticed a promising result.

Cooper's hawks, McGrath said, love to eat the doves. Almost unknown in this area a few years ago, the hawks now nest locally and stake out bird feeders frequented by the plump exotics.

The Christmas Bird Count converts such anecdotal information into the hard data that is extremely useful to ornithologists and wildlife managers.

An example occurred some years back when hunters on the Mid-Atlantic Coast reported seeing fewer and fewer black ducks.

According to Geoff LeBaron, Audubon's Christmas count coordinator, scientists with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service were able to document the hunter observations using the Christmas Bird Count and the comparable annual Breeding Bird Survey, and thereby begin black duck management programs to reverse those declines.

The Christmas Bird Count methodically documents bird species and their numbers in "circles." Each circle is 15 miles in diameter — about 176 square miles — and is counted each year. Some states like Massachusetts can contain no more circles.

Florida's 60 circles cover only about 16 percent of the state, providing a snapshot of winter bird populations.

"Here in Florida there is lots and lots of room for circles. There are important areas that are not even covered at all," according to Vincent Lucas, compiler for the Caloosa Bird Club, which does the south Lee County count.

Lucas said counters of every persuasion are needed. Some scour Cape Coral in cars and come up with the largest concentration of burrowing owls in the state. Some counters simply watch feeders in their own backyards, and others, more athletic, are able to do field work in areas that are less accessible.

Counters who have canoes, kayaks or other boats are especially valuable for counting remote areas. And people who are not expert birders provide valuable service as scribes, writing down the birds identified by others using binoculars and spotting scopes.

The Christmas Bird Count season is from Dec. 14 through Jan. 5 each year. Local counts are for one day, but

Myakka River: Jeanne Dubi (941) 355-1709
dubi@comcast.net

• Saturday, Dec. 30
Naples: Doug Sutor (293) 498-7772

DougSutor@colliergov.net

• Thursday, Jan. 4

Ten Thousand Islands: Terry Doyle (239) 353-8442
Ext. 228 Terry_Doyle@fws.gov

MORE INFO:

Caloosa Bird Club

<http://caloosabirdclub.org>

Florida Ornithological Society

<http://www.fosbirds.org/>

Audubon Christmas Bird Count 2006-2007

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>

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birds seen when scouting, three days before or after the official day, also are noted if none actually are seen during the count.

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