

## Christmas Bird Counts 2012

The yearend holiday season is a special time for birders to participate in the annual birding census surveys conducted in North America, the Caribbean, Latin America and some Pacific Islands. The 113<sup>th</sup> edition of the Christmas Bird Counts will be conducted in more than two thousand sites between December 14 and January 5. More than 60,000 birders participate annually in selected count sites, conducted in a 24 hour time frame in 30 mile diameter circles.

Once the count date is selected for a particular circle, the counters are at the mercy of the weather, which can vary from warm balmy to cold rainy and snowy days. We here in the South do not have the problems that our northern friends face relative to weather conditions. In my experience of more than 25 years of counting birds, I have experienced a wide variety of weather conditions; however, windy days are the least desirable from both comfort and finding birds. Winds tend to keep the birds hunkered down, particularly on cold days. Overcast days are more productive than clear sunny days - not sure of the reasons why.

Looking back to last year's counts here in the Hill Country, we had delightful weather, but few birds. The obvious reason for the scarcity of birds was the extensive drought of 2011 when little food sources were produced for our permanent and winter residents. Grass seed production was almost nil except along wet creek bottoms and many of these habitats went dry for lack of rain. Even the cedar trees were barren of berries for hungry birds. Most birds left the region in search of food. The opposite conditions occurred this year as we had excellent grass seed and cedar berry production from rains in the spring and summer. Although we are currently experiencing drier than normal conditions, food availability is not a pressing problem for the birds. I pointed out in a recent column that the local birds were shying away from backyard feeders because of other readily available food sources. Like in sports, we will have to play out the game to see what the count data will show as compared to historical data. I think we can say with some degree of surety that we will have better results this year.

Our three local count dates have been set: West Kerr on December 28; Kerrville on January 3 and Boerne/Comfort on January 5. If any of my readers are interested in participating in any of these three counts, please contact me by email: [billin2@beecreek.net](mailto:billin2@beecreek.net). I will forward your interest to the compiler of the counts. I am the compiler for the West Kerr CBC; Richard Redmond, for Kerrville; and Betty Dunne, for the Boerne/Comfort count. Being an expert birder is not a pre-requisite for participating. Success comes from having more spotters or listeners who can seek ID help from team members.

If you are contemplating being a part of our local area counts, please consider the following: you will have fun, you will likely see some good birds, and you will have an excellent learning experience. We generally count from dawn until about 5:00PM and have dinner at a local restaurant to share the day's findings. Birders are very competitive so each team is trying very hard to have the best bird of the day to claim "bragging rights." Birders have a saying, "Every day is a good birding day," regardless of the weather conditions.

Bill Lindemann

PS: Some members of the San Saba Bird & Nature Club participated in the West Kerr CBC on December 28 for the second time. It is a fun and rewarding experience. By the time the paper comes out only one count will remain so if you aren't doing anything else on January 5 consider helping out with the Boerne/Comfort Christmas Bird Count. You might find it an annual event you can't pass up.

Bundle up and go outside & play.