

Christmas Bird Count Update

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Dear Christmas Counter,

May 1986

This is the first opportunity I have had, as president of the National Audubon Society, to address the subscribers of *American Birds* and the several thousand others who participate annually in the Christmas Bird Count. Having been on the job not quite eight months, I have been impressed with the dedication, integrity and commitment of you who obviously believe so strongly in this activity. Many of you have loyally censused the same CBC circles for ten to fifty years, and, in the last decade alone, counters have spent well over 1.5 million hours afield, recording 700+ million birds.

Shortly after arriving at Audubon, one of my priorities became to explore ways in which we can better use Christmas Bird Count data and simultaneously make the job of reporting count information easier for compilers. Late in 1985, I appointed an eight-person *ad hoc* Task Force to examine all aspects of the count, and to make recommendations on how it could be made more effective and yet remain economically viable. The members of the Task Force, chaired by Professor Carl E. Bock from the University of Colorado, represent the best in their respective fields, and generously donated their time and effort in support of this Audubon project. In March 1986, the Task Force met with us in New York, and it has now submitted an extensive analysis and list of recommendations for the count's improvement.

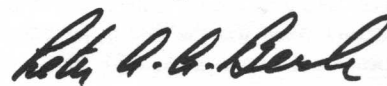
This is a very exciting step in the evolution of the CBC. A great many of the suggestions of the Task Force can be implemented by the 1986-1987 count. We are in the process of designing a new compiler's reporting form, and it will include many of these

recommendations. This new form is guaranteed to be easier to complete than the old one. We have also set in motion new systems, using computers for the first time in the count's 86 years, that will shorten appreciably the time lapsing from the end of the count to the appearance of the Christmas Bird Count issue. We look forward to publishing this mammoth volume annually in the September or October following the count.

We have been able to incorporate these advancements, happily, without additional cost to the count participants. Therefore, for the 1986-1987 CBC, the fee of \$3. (\$U.S. and \$Canadian), will remain unchanged.

Finally, I am hopeful that using these new systems, only some of which will be apparent to you, the counter, will enhance the scientific and environmental usefulness of the data. Specifically, researchers in the future will be able to call up specific kinds of data, rather than having to thumb through back issues of *American Birds*, making notes on file cards as they go. The National Audubon Society remains committed to the CBC as an integral part of the conservation movement in North America, and our contribution to that effort. Collectively, we can make a difference!

Sincerely,



Peter A. A. Berle
President

THE EIGHTY-SIXTH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (DECEMBER 18, 1985-JANUARY 5, 1986) is now a matter of history and we are busily compiling and editing those data so that you will be able to consume all of the minutiae in the *American Birds* Christmas Bird Count issue to be published in October 1986. In the meantime, we invite you to read some of the highlights here gleaned from the counts.

FIRSTS

We all knew it would happen. It was just a matter of time. The effervescent quality and upbeat undercurrent of frivolity that underlies the Christmas Bird Count reached an all-time high this year. The rewards of the CBC are often illusory, but in North Carolina, a couple of counters hit a real, tangible, and quite marvelous jackpot. The cold, damp, foggy predawn of December 21 looked like Frankenstein's idea of Club Med, but that failed to darken or deflate the spirits of the small group of CBCers gathered in the Goose Creek Game Impoundment Area in Pamlico County. Appropriately decked out with field clothes, boots, binoculars, and notepads, they gathered in an area known as "The Cathedral." The central people present, in addition to the count compiler and his wife, were a man, a woman, and Reverend Rich Boyd of the First Presbyterian Church of New Bern. Kathryn McCray and Dennis Smith were there to be married. And married they were at the close of a short 20-minute ceremony. Now here we are talking about hard-core birders. Following the service, Reverend Boyd, the Smiths, and their guests spent the rest of the day counting grebes, herons, Canvasbacks, scaup, Northern Bobwhites and Killdeer, lots of gulls and woodpeckers, and towhees

and sparrows. In the 86 years of the count, this is the first instance of a wedding between participants being held on count day. What a great way to begin a long-term commitment—just birding off into the sunset. Congratulations to the Smiths!

This was a year of firsts, not the least of which was the first record of a Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) logged on a CBC. Not only was this species recorded on the new Governor's Harbour count, which is in the Bahamas on Eleuthera Island, but it was also recorded during count week on the new Grand Turk Island count, Turks and Caicos Islands, in the British West Indies. Of course these birds were on their wintering grounds, long sought by researchers, but not discovered until last winter. Members of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) are working on both Eleuthera and Grand Turk Islands, analyzing the bird's winter habitat structure and also analyzing the foraging behaviors and patterns of this endangered species. Howe and Taylor, the only participants on the Governor's Harbour count and members of the Team, were fortunate enough to locate one of the birds under observation on count day. Amazingly, this individual is one that had been color-banded on Eleuthera Island in February 1985, was subsequently seen on its breeding grounds in the northern part of Michigan's lower peninsula last summer, and has now returned to winter in the same desert scrub field in which it was banded.

Another memorable first: through the combined efforts of all of the participants, the Christmas Bird Count has reached its all-time highest level with 1501 counts taken this year. This can only be thought of as industrial strength counting. The number of participants on this year's CBC was 38,333, with 32,973 of those folks actually birding in the field. The remaining 5360 were feeder watchers, whose contributions to the census are considerable.