



photo by Cory Shaw, courtesy CBC

Counting Birds at Christmas

Mini Fact:

The CBC takes places in the U.S., Canada and other countries around the world.

For more than 120 years, people have been leaving their cozy homes to brave the cold outdoors and count birds. Thousands of volunteers have made the Christmas Bird Count part of their holiday tradition. It runs during the three weeks around Christmas Day.

This bird *census*, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, is the longest-running wildlife review in the world. It is also the largest.

The period for counting birds stretches from Dec. 14 through Jan. 5. Officials can choose any day in that period to count in their area.

This period is known as “early winter.” During this time, many North American birds are still on their southward migration.

Conducting the bird count

All counts are done in a certain way and in the same area each year. This gives a more accurate view of any changes in bird populations.

On the chosen count day, volunteers travel through a circle covering about 177 square miles. They count every bird they see or hear that whole day. Some birds, especially in woodland areas, stay hidden.



Photo by Rob Routledge, courtesy CBC

This American bald eagle was counted during the 120th CBC.

There are usually people in every counting group who can recognize bird calls.

Often watchers will walk slowly through an area in the assigned circle. Then they will drive to the next spot and get out and walk again.

In some places, such as marshes, volunteers go by boat. Others may travel on skis or snowshoes. Some may spend the entire day standing by the ocean counting seabirds.

Experienced bird-watchers are always present, so they can teach new watchers the proper way to count.

The value of bird counting

In nature, birds are a good sign of whether the environment is healthy.

When the data from the Christmas Bird Count are combined with data from other studies, we get a good picture of the overall health of birds and of the environment.

By looking at how bird populations have changed, scientists can be alerted about possible dangers. For example, if one type of bird disappears in an area, it could mean the habitat has been destroyed. Or it could mean there is a disease, or that the species has been poisoned with pesticides. If bird populations go down a lot, it is a danger signal.

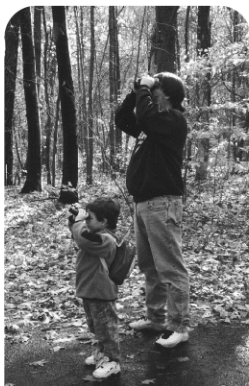


photo courtesy CBC

Bird watchers of all ages can join in the CBC.

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of the Christmas Bird Count are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

AREA, AUDUBON, BIRD, CALLS, CENSUS, CHAPMAN, CHRISTMAS, COUNT, DATA, HEALTHY, HUNT, NATURE, POPULATION, SPECIES, VOLUNTEER, WATCH, WILDLIFE, WINTER.

H C T A W B T C A L L S L J B
A R E A N P T N U O C R V I M
B I R D S C E N S U S E O L U
P O P U L A T I O N N T L M H
G S E I C E P S A R O N U F E
D T C H R I S T M A S I N D A
N O B U D U A B T V S W T D L
K E R U T A N D G N H T E A T
C H A P M A N S W R U S E T H
Z E F I L D L I W D K H R A Y



Cook's Corner

Festive Fudge Goodie Bags

You'll need:

- 1 1/2 pounds white chocolate, broken in pieces
- 1 (10-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk

What to do:

1. In a bowl, combine chocolate, milk and salt.
2. Microwave on high for 3 to 5 minutes until chocolate is melted.
3. Stir in vanilla extract and gumdrops.
4. Line a 9-by-12-inch pan with waxed paper, pour fudge into pan and refrigerate until firm.
5. Cut into squares and wrap several pieces together at a time.
6. Place wrapped squares in a brown paper bag and decorate as you wish. Makes about 2 dozen squares.

- pinch of salt
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup gumdrop candies, cut in half



* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.



1. The outer, soft covering of a bird (8-letter plural noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

2. Covered with many different hues (8-letter adjective)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

3. Home for birds, eggs and young (4-letter noun)

□ □ □ □

4. Area behind a house or an apartment (8-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

1. Clara glued pretty gray _____ on her bedroom wall.
2. Jason enjoyed seeing _____ birds in his storybook.
3. Marco saw a _____ of baby robins in a big maple tree.
4. Every morning, Susie uses her swing in the _____.

ROOTONYM®
by Jan & Carey Orr Cook



Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: Feathers, Colorful, Nest, Backyard.

CBC history

The Christmas Bird Count got its name because the first count took place on Christmas Day in 1900. It was founded by Frank Chapman, a scientist who studied birds. He was upset by an event of the times, the “Side Hunt.”

In this event, on Christmas Day, hunters chose sides and then shot as many birds and small animals as they could. The side that killed the most animals and birds won.

Many people were concerned that overhunting was threatening entire bird populations. Frank Chapman came up with the idea of counting birds on Christmas Day rather than killing them.

Results

The CBC in 2019-2020 included more than 80,000 bird-watchers who observed 2,566 total species of birds. But sadly, there were 6 million fewer birds seen than the year before. The Audubon Society will study results to try to find out the reason for the drop in number of birds.



Frank Chapman (1864-1945)

photo courtesy American Museum of Natural History

Resources



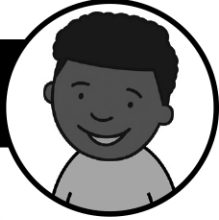
On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPbirds

At the library:

- “Bird Count” by Susan Edwards Richmond
- “Counting Birds: The Idea That Helped Save Our Feathered Friends” by Heidi E.Y. Stemple

Mini Jokes



Bobby: What kind of bird works at a construction site?
Britton: A crane!

Eco Note



The natural soundscape of chirping birds across much of North America and Europe appears to have become quieter and less varied over the past 25 years, in which researchers say bird numbers have plummeted. Simon Butler of Britain's University of East Anglia and colleagues found there was a sharp decline in both the diversity and intensity of birdsongs, mirroring the loss of bird populations during the study period.

adapted with permission from Earthweek.com

For later:

Look in your newspaper for articles about the CBC in your area.

Teachers: Follow and interact with The Mini Page on Facebook!



Books from The Mini Page are wonderful resources and make great gifts! See all of our Mini Page products at [MiniPageBooks.com](https://www.minipagebooks.com), or call 800-642-6480 for more information. Mail payment to: Andrews McMeel Universal, Mini Page Books, 1130 Walnut, Kansas City, MO 64106. Include \$4.00 shipping and handling per order.

