

Planning for the 2020 Columbia Christmas Bird Count

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The Covid-19 pandemic has affected nearly everything we do during 2020, and the Christmas Bird Count is no exception. Given the risks associated with face-to-face gatherings, The National Audubon Society has given local chapters like CAS the freedom to decide whether to conduct their local count or not. There is a strong sentiment among the CAS membership in favor of holding our count and the Board has agreed to move forward with planning this event.

The Columbia CBC is scheduled for Saturday December 19. We will follow guidelines suggested by NAS to ensure that our count will be a safe, socially distanced event. Of course, we understand that everyone's health situation is different, and that some potential counters may opt out for good reason.

Here's a summary of how the Columbia CBC will be different this year:

1. Count Areas, Area Leaders, and Volunteers. We will use the traditional count areas to ensure broad coverage of birds our count circle. One or more of the count areas are currently without a leader, but we have many qualified birders to fill these slots. Contact Laura Hillman (HillmanL@health.missouri.edu) to volunteer as an area leader or a group member.
2. Counting the Birds. This is probably the least affected part of our CBC routine. The biggest difference in this phase of the count will be to wear masks or other protective equipment and to minimize contacts with other counters. This means no carpooling with people outside your household, and it may mean that we will split into more small groups (e.g., singles or pairs) to cover different parts of a count area. Contact your Area Leader to discuss your assignment.
3. Reporting and Compiling the Data. The biggest change in our CBC routine will be the elimination of the traditional chili dinner and group tally. Instead, we ask that each group record their sightings in one or more eBird checklists (www.ebird.org). These checklists can be shared with the CAS group eBird account (account name 'casbirddata'). All the CBC checklists will be compiled and submitted to the National Audubon Society's CBC database. For more details, see the attached text, 'How to eBird Your Christmas Bird count' or contact John Besser (jbesser1@gmail.com).
4. The CBC 'Zoom' Check-in Event. Much of the fun of the Christmas Bird Count comes from telling others about your best birds and from hearing these reports from other groups. We won't be able to do this in person, but we're going to try an informal on-line gathering via Zoom. CAS President Jim Gast will be organizing this event; stay tuned for more details.

Thanks to all the volunteers who help make this event successful and safe!

HOW TO 'e-BIRD' THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

- A. COUNT BIRDS AND BE SAFE [EVERYBODY]. This is the most important thing. Maintain a safe social distance, wear a mask, and stay home if you don't feel well!
- B. PREPARE E-BIRD CHECKLISTS [GROUP / AREA LEADERS]. You can use continuous data entry using the mobile eBird app, or you can record species & counts and enter data later via the eBird website (www.ebird.org). If you can't submit your own eBird checklists, ask for help. You will need separate checklists for each group, and for counts conducted at different locations. Here is the most important information to include in each checklist:
- LOCATION. Select an existing eBird hotspot or set up a personal location by clicking on the map in eBird. Don't use your entire CBC Area as a location!
 - DATE AND EFFORT:
 - Date / Start time / Duration / Party size
 - Observation type [Traveling or Stationary]
 - Distance traveled [Use one-way distance if you re-trace your route]
 - CHECKLIST COMMENTS:
 - Record your count area. e.g., 'Columbia CBC AREA 6'.
 - Record names of group leader and party members
 - Record notes on weather
 - BIRD SPECIES AND COUNTS
- C. SUBMIT YOUR CHECKLIST(S) using one of these methods [**GROUP / AREA LEADERS**]:
- Enter checklist to your personal ebird account and share with CAS group eBird account using group ID ('casbirddata') or email (casbirddata@gmail.com) OR
 - Log into the CAS eBird account (user id='casbirddata', password='wildhaven') and create your checklist there
- C. PREPARE DATA FOR UPLOAD [COMPILERS]
- Summarize species / counts / participants / party hours / weather for entire count circle
 - Harmonize species list and upload data to national database