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AUDUBON BIRDERS AND NATURE ENTHUSIASTS IN THE MATANUSKA VALLEY TO TAKE PART IN 112th ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

COUNT PROVIDES ESSENTIAL DATA FOR CONSERVATION

Ivyland, Pennsylvania, October 16, 2011 – Birders and nature enthusiasts in the Matanuska Valley will join birders across the western hemisphere and participate in Audubon's longest-running wintertime tradition, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This year, over 2,200 individual counts are scheduled to take place throughout the Americas and beyond from December 14, 2011 to January 5, 2012. The Mat. Valley CBC will be held on Sunday, December 18th in Palmer and Wasilla.

“Each CBC volunteer observer is an important contributor, helping to shape the overall direction of bird conservation,” says Geoff LeBaron, National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count Director. “Audubon and our partners at Bird Studies Canada and the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center rely on data from the CBC database to inform a myriad of analyses regarding both bird conservation and climate change. Last season's CBC report of *American Birds* included a baseline study of CBC data around the Gulf Coast, which will enable researchers to track the recovery of that hard-hit region in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.”

During last year's count, about 61 million birds were tallied in 2215 locations by over 62,000 volunteers, the number of both locations and observers a record level of participation. Thanks in part to Bird Studies Canada, the Canadian partner for the CBC, the number counts across the Americas, Caribbean, and in the Pacific Islands has risen steadily in recent years.

The CBC began over a century ago when 27 conservationists in 25 localities, led by scientist and writer Frank Chapman, changed the course of ornithological history. On Christmas Day in 1900, the small group posed an alternative to the “side hunt,” a Christmas day activity in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small mammals. Instead, Chapman proposed that they identify, count, and record all the birds they saw, founding what is now considered to be the world's most significant citizen-based conservation effort – and a more than century-old institution.

Since Chapman's retirement in 1934, new generations of observers have performed the modern-day count. Today, over 60,000 volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies, and Pacific Islands, count and record every individual bird and bird species seen in a specified area.

The 112th CBC is expected to be larger than ever, expanding its geographical coverage and accumulating information about the winter distributions of various birds. The CBC is vital in

monitoring the status of resident and migratory birds across the Western Hemisphere, and the data, which are 100% volunteer generated, have become a crucial part of the U.S. Government's natural history monitoring database.

This year's Matanuska Valley Christmas Bird Count on December 18th will be the Valley's 32nd consecutive CBC. Valley field counters will attempt to count every bird seen inside of the Matanuska Valley Count Circle, a 15 mile diameter circle centered at Four Corners on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. Valley residents who live within 7.5 miles of Four Corners (as the raven flies) and who have bird feeders in their yard, can participate in our local Count by counting the different species of birds that visit their feeders on December 18th.

If you would like to participate in this year's Matanuska Valley Christmas Bird Count by counting birds at your feeders, contact Bob Winckler, the Matanuska Valley Count Compiler at <msbirder@mtaonline.net> and he will provide instructions on how the CBC works and tips on how to feeder-count birds.

For more information about CBC participation, visit Audubon's website at www.christmasbirdcount.org and click on the "Get Involved" link on the right-hand side of the page.

CBC compilers enter their count data via Audubon's website at www.christmasbirdcount.org or through Bird Studies Canada's homepage at www.bsc-eoc.org, where the 112th Count results will be viewable in near real-time. Explore this information for the winter of 2011-2012 or visit a count from the past. See if and how the state of your local birds has changed during the last 25...50...or 100 years.

Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation. www.audubon.org
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