

The Oceanside Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes place around Christmas every year. An annual event organized by the National Audubon Society, Buena Vista Audubon (BVAS) has been sponsoring the local CBC since the 1950s. Below are some highlights from the past few years:

The total for the 2017 (118th) Christmas Bird Count was 193 species. We had around 150 birders recording approximately 35,000 individual birds, and logging in 191 hours. Most abundant species were yellow-rumped warblers (3109), American crow (2563), white-crowned sparrow (1895), and American coot (1875).

Rarities included Pacific golden plover (1) at Guajome, sage thrasher (1) and white-throated sparrow (1) at Camp Pendleton, and one Nashville warbler found at north Batiquitos.

Record high numbers of great horned owls (14), merlin (13), Eurasian collared dove (239), acorn woodpeckers (164), phainopepla (46), Hutton's vireo (20), and yellow warbler (6) were seen.

In addition, we had a team of young birders at Agua Hedionda led by Ryan Andrews. They were accompanied by Jenni Doering who brought her tape recorder and will feature them and the Oceanside CBC on a future Public Radio International's "Living on Earth" series.

The 117th Oceanside CBC, in 2016, was rainy and cold; in spite of this, there were approximately 183 species seen, and more than 30,970 birds counted. We estimate there were more than 120 participants in 39 teams. Highlights for the day included two species new to the count circle; an Eastern Bell's Vireo found by Tito Gonzalez near Buena Vista Audubon Nature Center, and six Lilac-crowned Parrots found by Andy Mauro at Agua Hedionda Lagoon. Other unusual birds included; Black and White Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Bullock's Oriole, Western Tanager and Summer Tanager. The highest-ever populations of several inland bird species were found including 17 Greater Roadrunner, 130 Acorn Woodpecker, 136 California Thrasher, and 495 California Towhees.

As far as more common birds counted for the 2016 Oceanside CBC, these included: American coot (2689), yellow-rumped warbler (2614), white-crowned sparrow (1855), American wigeon (1814), American crow (1382), mourning dove (1359), California gull (1113), house finch (1015), European starling (970), bushtit (899), and Anna's hummingbird (719).

In 2015-the 116th Oceanside CBC-140 people participated, and tallied 196 different bird species, which is the second-highest species total for the Oceanside count, surpassed only by a couple of 200-species counts recorded about 20 years ago.

The Christmas Bird Count began in 1900 as an alternative to a holiday hunting contest. Conservation was in its beginning stages, and there was concern about declining bird populations. Members of the Audubon Society began a new holiday tradition, a "Christmas Bird Census," that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them. Currently, there are over 2,500 individual CBCs conducted worldwide.

This "Citizen Science" has been vital over the years, with the data collected by observers allowing researchers, biologists, and wildlife agencies to study the long-term health of bird populations across North America. This helps create strategies to protect birds and their habitats, and helps identify key environmental issues and impacts, such as climate change.

Stay tuned for the annual Christmas Bird Count-see the Calendar of Events and News section for each year's date!