

Count shows increased species, birds

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By The Desert Awareness Committee

GUEST

Each year, the National Audubon Society conducts a coast-to-coast bird census. During the census, birders count every bird and every species they encounter during a 24-hour period beginning at midnight. The census is known as 'the Christmas Bird Count. Over a period of time, the data from the CBC can provide valuable insight into the long-term health of bird populations and the environment.

Each census area is a circle 15 miles in diameter, and as much of the United States as possible is covered. It is generally limited by the number of observers and count coordinators available. The counts are done over a 2½-week period from the end of December to the first part of January. Results of the count are published in *National Audubon Field Notes*, a magazine for birders.

The bird count of local interest is the Carefree count, which was conducted Jan. 2. The count circle was centered three miles north of the Carefree airport, extending north to Seven Springs

to just below Lone Mountain Road in the south. It extends west to the New River mountains and toward Bartlett Lake on the east. The circle was broken up into segments by the count coordinator. The Carefree coordinator broke the count circles into 10 parts, each consisting of three to five observers. Species can be counted by sightings or hearing, but all observers should agree on the species seen or heard.

People will often ask, "How can you be sure that you are not counting the same birds twice?" This is always a difficulty; however, observers count only those birds within their well-defined assigned areas. Generally, rare species are quite well known, and they are not a problem. However, species that are abundant may indeed fly from one area to another during the day and get counted again. Since this is not an exact science that can be controlled, it is subject to small discrepancies.

Other factors may have a much greater impact, such as weather, number of participants and familiarity with the region, etc.

The area covered by the author this year was Trail 4, beginning just south of Seven Springs and traveling west and south to the Tonto National Forest boundary. The five members in our group met at 6 a.m. in Cave Creek and drove to the Spur Cross Ranch to park two cars. During the exchange of cars, a "hoo, hoo-oo, hoo, hoo" was heard, and all volunteers shouted, "Great horned owl!" However, this was south of our territory. The bird was noted and was given to the appropriate group for inclusion in the count at the roundup dinner at the El Encanto Cafe at dusk.

Our group got back into the remaining cars for the trip to Seven Springs. Three of the five volunteers would walk Trail 4 for 10 miles to the national forest boundary, while two others would return via Trail 247 to Seven Springs for the cars.

Upon reaching our territory, a dozen Western bluebirds, numer-

ous Townsend's solitaires, spotted towhees, white-crowned sparrows and Gambel's quail were spotted and counted. The trail is difficult to walk, it is basically for horses. Walking along the beautiful riparian area for the first several miles, trying to spot birds in the air and in trees and not twist an ankle on the many loose rocks was a challenge.

The total count for our group was 48 species and a total of 577 birds, two coyotes, six mule deer, no golf courses and an emu (not countable). The roundup dinner at El Encanto starts another four weeks of work for the count coordinator (getting all entries from people with bird feeders, authenticating results, etc.), with results showing that the entire area had seen 107 different species and a total of 9,481 birds. This was a considerable increase from the prior year's results, which had 92 species and 6,462 birds. Total birders also increased from 33 to 54.

More information is available from the Desert Awareness Committee, P.O. Box 1722, Cave Creek, AZ 85331.