

## It's Almost Christmas: Time to Count Some Birds

[EnvironmentNate Seltenrich](#) — Thu, Dec 13, 2012 at 1:08 PM

Tomorrow, December 14, holds the dubious distinction — at least among retailers and time-strapped shoppers — of being the second-to-last Friday before Christmas. Much more importantly, as far as we're concerned, it's also opening day of the Audubon Society's 2013 **Christmas Bird Count**.

The annual census, launched in 1900 as a response to Christmastime bird-hunting traditions, aims to assess year-round and wintering bird populations within fifteen-mile-diameter circles throughout the western hemisphere. California hosts 133 such 24-hour surveys this year, including 21 in the Bay Area. Birders in Benicia, southern Marin County, Oakland, San Francisco, Palo Alto, San Jose, and other cities will play their part in the nation's oldest and largest survey conducted by citizen scientists, **a tradition that has expanded in the age of the digital app**.

If you're looking to spot some of nature's most awe-inspiring raptors, the place to go is Eastern Alameda County, home to bald eagles, ferruginous hawks, peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, a whole host of owls, and, well, the **densest habitat for golden eagles in the world**. The fourth-annual **Eastern Alameda County Christmas Bird Count**, sponsored by the Alameda Creek Alliance and the Ohlone Audubon Society, happens tomorrow, but a special assessment of rare species continues through the 17th. Rich Cimino, conservation chair of the Ohlone Audubon Society and events director for the Alameda Creek Alliance, said that nearly 100 birders, ornithologists, and public-lands-agency staff have already signed up, but that there's still room for more people. To get involved, visit **[OhloneAudubon.org](#)** or **[AlamedaCreek.org](#)**.

Despite the richness of the region's varied habitats, many resident species are in decline, the Ohlone Audubon Society reports: Yellow-billed magpies are suffering due to West Nile virus and loss of woodland habitat; golden eagles are threatened by collisions with wind turbines in the Altamont Pass; and Western burrowing owl populations are declining throughout their range due to habitat loss and locally are also at risk of impacts with turbines. Bald eagles, in recovery nationwide, only recently began breeding in the area.

To learn more about participating in a Christmas Bird Count near you, **[head here](#)**.