

Fourth Annual Eastern Alameda Bird Count This Friday

Citizen-Led Christmas Bird Count Monitors Wintering Bird Populations in Alameda Creek Watershed

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Sunol, CA – An estimated 90 volunteer birdwatchers of all levels of experience will survey for wintering birds in eastern Alameda County this Friday, December 14, as part of the fourth annual Eastern Alameda County Christmas Bird Count. The Alameda Creek Alliance and Ohlone Audubon Society sponsor the bird count, which covers a 15 mile radius circle in the vicinity of Pleasanton, Sunol and Livermore, within the Alameda Creek watershed.

The Christmas Bird Count is an annual, nationwide volunteer-based bird survey effort coordinated by the Audubon Society to promote bird conservation and assess long-term trends in winter bird populations. In the largest citizen science effort in the world, tens of thousands of volunteer birders and scientists armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists take part in Christmas bird counts throughout the Americas from mid-December through early January. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess health of bird populations and help guide conservation actions.

“Nearly 100 local birders, ornithologists and public lands agency staff will participate in this year’s bird count, and there is room for more volunteers of any level of experience,” said Rich Cimino, Conservation Chair of the Ohlone Audubon Society, and Events Director for the Alameda Creek Alliance. “Our bird count contributes to bird conservation and monitoring efforts and promotes stewardship of bird populations and their habitats within the Alameda Creek watershed,” added Cimino, initiator of the Eastern Alameda count.

There are 21 different Christmas Bird Counts in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Eastern Alameda count area is in the vicinity of Sunol, Pleasanton and Livermore, and includes five East Bay Regional Parks, San Francisco watershed lands, and birding hotspots such as lower Mines Road, Sunol Wilderness, Del Valle Reservoir, and the Springtown area in Livermore. Volunteers walk, bicycle or drive count areas, or monitor backyard feeders during a 24 hour period on December 14. Additional surveys during the count week of December 11 to 17 will locate, identify, and record rare bird species. The surveys will be non-intrusive observations of birds, with volunteers following an ethics code to avoid any impacts to birds or habitats.

Rare and notable bird species found during the past few years of the Eastern Alameda count include bald eagles, golden eagles, ferruginous hawks, peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, northern pygmy-owls, short-eared owls, burrowing owls, Lewis' woodpeckers, yellow-billed magpies, rock wrens, canyon wrens, tri-colored blackbirds, and uncommon sparrows (rufous-crowned, lark, vesper and grasshopper sparrows).

Yellow-billed magpies are endemic to central California and have declined due to West Nile virus and loss of oak woodland habitat. Bald eagles only recently began breeding in the Bay Area and were removed from the endangered species list. Golden eagles are threatened locally by collisions with wind turbines at Altamont Pass. Western burrowing owls are declining rapidly in the Bay Area due to habitat loss from urban development and are also killed in large numbers by Altamont wind turbines. Lewis' woodpeckers are brightly colored denizens of open-canopy forests that are a state species of special concern.

The history of the Christmas Bird Count has its roots in opposition to an early American holiday tradition known as Christmas “side hunts,” where teams would compete to see who could shoot more wildlife and come back with the biggest pile of dead birds. Conservationists and scientists concerned about declining

bird populations proposed a new holiday tradition beginning on Christmas Day 1900, a “Christmas Bird Count” that would tally birds rather than hunt them.

Birders and volunteers with any level of experience can participate and are assigned to teams based on their bird identification skill level and endurance. The count circle is divided into over two dozen sections, each with a leading birder with specific knowledge of the area. To get involved, visit ohloneaudubon.org or www.alamedacreek.org.

The Ohlone Audubon Society is chapter of the national Audubon Society serving southern Alameda County that works to preserve the natural world through education, conservation, and advocacy. The Alameda Creek Alliance is a community watershed group with over 2,000 members, dedicated to protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek watershed.