

## GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

1. It is highly recommended that you scout your territory in advance in order to stake out any rare birds that might be present this year.
2. Bird the prime spots in your area during the early morning and late evening hours, the times when birds are most active. For songbirds, the “dawn chorus” can be more rewarding than the rest of the day.
3. If your area includes shoreline or bayshore areas check the tide tables. Shorebirds will be concentrated in resting areas just before and during high tide or they will be feeding in exposed non-tidal or fresh-water areas. They will be feeding on the tidal flats or shores on the outgoing tide. The rocky shore sandpipers, for example, are best seen an hour or so after the turn of the tide.
4. Don't go too fast. Pause every now and then to listen and to wait for secretive birds to come out of hiding.
5. Constantly scan the sky for hawks and waterfowl. Examine every group of birds for the unusual.
6. If you finish your area early, take a break and then recheck the better areas for species you may have missed.
7. Try to cover as much of the area as possible on foot. If a homeowner or property owner asks you, introduce yourself as a participant in the Audubon Society's annual national bird census. They may invite you to bird on their land.
8. If you are new to birding or to the counts, don't be upset if the more experienced participants can't spend much time on instruction. It's important to keep searching for and counting birds. Join us on our field trips when our members have the time to pass on what they have learned.
9. Don't underestimate the numbers of birds seen in flocks or rafts of birds. Early in the day check your estimates with actual counts and adjust your “guesstimator” accordingly.
10. If for any reason, you can't fulfill your obligation, then call your leader or one of the organizers so that adjustments can be made.
11. Please age peregrine, golden and bald eagles and other less common raptors, e.g ferruginous hawks.

### LEADERS! REMEMBER YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- A. Turning in the completed checklist of birds – remember to include your count area.
- B. Turning in the participants' information including time and mileages.
- C. Making sure that “good” birds are properly documented. Document sheets are enclosed, but any piece of paper may be used. Photographs are particularly useful.

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## TIPS FOR USING eBIRD

Many of us use eBird to count. Since the Christmas Bird Count records certain subspecies separately from each other when known (e.g., Audubon's and Myrtle Yellow-rumped Warblers), it is helpful to enable the ability to record subspecies in the eBird mobile app. This is done in the Settings and Accounts section of the app. Click the "... More" tab at the bottom of eBird, then "Settings and Accounts." Under "SUBSPECIES," enable "Show subspecies for data entry" per the screen shot below.



This will allow you to optionally specify subspecies of birds in eBird. If you can't identify the subspecies, then just enter the species without designating a subspecies.

Creating multiple checklists for your count is encouraged when you are counting an area with multiple hotspots and so on.

## TIPS FOR USING MERLIN SOUND ID

The Merlin bird identification mobile app has become a popular tool for birders. In particular, birders are using Merlin Sound ID more than ever. Care must be taken when using Merlin Sound ID for the Christmas Bird Count. Bear in mind that the makers of Merlin state, "Merlin's suggestions are just a starting point. **You should always independently verify each suggestion before reporting it.**"

Further: "Like all birders, Merlin can make mistakes. **If you're not confident that Merlin's suggestion is correct, or if you have not considered it independently, don't report it to eBird. (Do not report whatever Merlin says without considering it first!).**"

For many of our areas, counting by ear is an essential part of counting. Merlin Sound ID can augment our ability to count by ear so long as it is used judiciously. Merlin Sound ID works best when you know what birds are expected in the area you are counting, and you have at least a

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general working knowledge of bird sounds. Often, Merlin Sound ID can make an ID that you can then confirm from previous experience or by seeing the bird itself. That is, it can “remind” you of what you’re hearing.

The closer you get to a vocalizing bird, the more accurate Merlin Sound ID becomes. Pointing your mobile device’s microphones at the vocalizing bird will also improve accuracy. It can also be helpful to use Sound ID more than once on a vocalizing bird in case Merlin initially makes a mistake. Sometimes Merlin Sound ID will confuse related species but will settle on the correct species when given enough time. In addition, you can save Merlin Sound ID recordings for later verification.

Never solely rely on Merlin Sound ID to identify rare birds. (If you know bird sounds and can identify the bird yourself, then a Merlin Sound ID recording can be a helpful part of a rare bird report.)

Keep in mind that Merlin Sound ID will often interpret the sounds of Merriam’s chipmunks as Northern Pygmy Owls. Therefore, Merlin Sound ID should not be the sole basis for identifying Pygmy Owls.

In summary, use judgement when interpreting Merlin Sound ID results.