

Christmas Bird Count: Reserve Volunteers Contribute to Annual Census Effort

On a cold morning in December, armed with binoculars, spotting scopes, and thick coats, N.C. Coastal Reserve volunteers participated in a long-standing holiday tradition that has nothing to do with trimming trees or singing carols. The volunteers joined Central Sites Manager Paula Gillikin for the [Christmas Bird Count](#), an annual bird census organized by the National Audubon Society with the goal of using citizen scientists to survey bird populations throughout the Americas.

This year marks the 114th year of the Christmas Bird Count, which began in 1900 as an alternative to the then-popular “Christmas Side Hunt,” where participants would choose sides during a hunting excursion and compete to bring back the most prey. Early Audubon ornithologist Frank M. Chapman established the Christmas Bird Count as a new annual event in the wake of growing concern about dwindling bird populations at the turn of the 20th century. Since then, the event has become the longest-running citizen science survey in the world, and provides valuable data to scientists and wildlife managers studying migration patterns and bird population dynamics.

The Rachel Carson Reserve has participated in the Christmas Bird Count for several decades, and the census has become a popular volunteer activity for avid birdwatchers from along the North Carolina coast. Reserve volunteers surveyed the entire shoreline of the Rachel Carson Reserve (excluding the Middle Marsh area), and observed several unique bird species including juvenile bald eagles, red knots, piping plovers, ruddy turnstones, and bluebirds. As one of the most recognizable and symbolic bird species in the United States, the juvenile bald eagles were a favorite sight for many of the volunteers. After several chilly hours the volunteers returned to the Reserve’s Beaufort headquarters, satisfied with their bird tally and proud of their contribution to an important national effort to improve avian conservation through citizen science.



Volunteers gather for the annual Christmas Bird Count



Bluebirds silhouetted against a cloudy sky



American Oystercatcher with a research band on its leg