

Media Release - For Immediate Release

Calling all birders! Come out for the 109th Christmas Bird Count

Toronto, December 10, 2008 – Between December 14 and January 5, 2009, thousands of expert and amateur birders will participate in the 109th annual Christmas Bird Count, a well-established tradition for naturalists across the continent.

This year, more than 40 Ontario Nature member groups are leading bird counts in communities as far north as Thunder Bay and Sudbury, to Point Pelee and Holiday Beach in the south, and Kingston and Ottawa to the east.

The Christmas Bird Count started out as the Christmas Bird Census led by American ornithologist Frank Chapman as an alternative to the then-popular “side hunt” in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small mammals as a Christmas day activity. Chapman’s suggestion that birds be counted instead of shot changed the course of ornithological history with the founding of what is now considered to be the world’s most significant citizen science-based conservation effort.

Today, more than 2,000 individual counts are scheduled to take place throughout the Americas, and more than 100 counts will occur in Ontario alone.

Says Caroline Schultz, Executive Director of Ontario Nature, “The Christmas Bird Count is great fun yet at the same time provides very valuable scientific data. Ontario Nature was founded by a small group of enthusiastic nature clubs with a keen interest in the welfare of birds, so supporting this kind of citizen science is an inherent part of what we do.”

During last year’s Christmas Bird Count, nearly 58,000 volunteers across North America tallied some 70 million birds. This year’s Christmas Bird Count is expected to be even larger.

Counts are open to birders of all skill levels. The data is used by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Bird Studies Canada and the National Audubon Society to monitor the status of all bird species across the western hemisphere.

For a full list of the Ontario Nature member groups that are holding bird counts and when, please visit the Nature Network on our website, www.ontarionature.org.

Quick facts:

- In 2007, 11,565 participants in Canada counted more than 3.2 million birds in a record-high 371 counts.

- Biologists around the world use the data collected from the counts to monitor the populations and distribution of North American birds. Some of it has been used as key evidence for serious declines: Christmas Bird Count data provided pivotal information in the decision to list the Newfoundland red crossbill and the rusty blackbird under the federal Species at Risk Act.
- More than 55,000 volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies and Pacific Islands, count and record every individual bird and bird species seen in a specified area.
- In recent years, Christmas Bird Counts have revealed declines in northern shrikes and Harris's sparrow (both by nearly 2% a year). These results help prioritize Canada's bird conservation activities.

Christmas bird counts will occur in the following locations:

Friends of Rondeau	Blenheim/Rondeau
Guelph Field Naturalists	Guelph
Kingston Field Naturalists	Kingston
Kitchener Waterloo Field Naturalists	Cambridge
Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club	Pakenham-Arnprior
Muskoka Field Naturalists	Gravenhurst-Bracebridge
Nipissing Naturalists	North Bay
Peninsula Field Naturalists	St. Catharines
Peterborough Field Naturalists	Peterborough
South Peel Naturalists' Club	Oakville-Mississauga
Toronto Ornithological Club	Toronto
Kingston Field Naturalists	Delta
Penokean Hills Field Naturalists	Elliot Lake
Kingston Field Naturalists	Westport
Bancroft Field Naturalist Club	Bancroft
Kingston Field Naturalists	Prince Edward Point
Kitchener Waterloo Field Naturalists	Kitchener
Lambton Wildlife Inc./Friends of Pinery Park	Pinery Provincial Park
London (McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London)	London and area
Manitoulin Nature Club	Manitoulin
Pembroke Area Field Naturalists	Pembroke, ON
Richmond Hill Naturalists	Richmond Hill
South Lake Simcoe Naturalists	Sutton
Willow Beach Field Naturalists	Port Hope – Cobourg
Woodstock Field Naturalists	Woodstock
Durham Region Field Naturalists	Durham Region
Hamilton Naturalists Club	Hamilton
St Thomas Field Naturalist Club	Eastern and Central Elgin County
Thunder Bay Field Naturalists	Thunder Bay
Halton/North Peel	North Halton
Kingston Field Naturalists	Thousand Islands
Kitchener Waterloo Field Naturalists	Linwood (NW of Waterloo)

Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists
Stratford Field Naturalist
Ingersoll District Nature Club
Rideau Valley Field Naturalists
Huron Fringe Field Naturalists
Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists
Kingston Field Naturalists
Upper Credit Field Naturalists
Saugeen Shores
York Simcoe Naturalists

Carleton Place
Stratford
Lawson Nature Reserve
Rideau Ferry
Kincardine
Lanark Highlands
Amherst Island
Caledon/Orangeville
Saugeen Shores
Bradford

- 30 -

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Ontario Nature protects wild species and wild spaces through conservation, education and public engagement. It connects thousands of individuals and communities with nature through conservation groups across the province (charitable registration #10737 8952 RR0001). For more information, visit www.ontarionature.org.