

Winter Blahs? Try the Christmas Bird Count

*Dave deCalesta – Reprinted from KLA
Newsletter 9/05*

*Looking for something different to do over
the winter holiday?*

*Want to get a little outdoor exercise, meet new
people, and contribute to a worthy cause?*

*Why not participate in this year's
Christmas Bird Count?*

The Christmas Bird Count originated in 1900 partly to counter a then popular Christmas tradition: the "Side Hunt." The objective of the "Side Hunt" was for teams to compete to see which one could shoot the most furred and feathered critters on Christmas day. Anything went - dickie birds, hawks, pheasants, rabbits, deer, possums, you name (or rather shoot) it.

The objective of the Christmas Bird Count, on the other hand, was to count as many live birds as possible in one 24-hour period. The first count, on Christmas day, was conducted by 27 volunteers in New York City who counted 90 different bird species.

The count has continued annually. Now over 50,000 volunteers participate in all states, provinces, and some Central and South American countries at - 2,000 different locations. The count is conducted over one 24-hour period at each location at a pre-determined date set within the 2 1/2 week period surrounding December 25th (December 14-January 5).

There are two Christmas Bird Count locations around Keuka Lake: Penn Yan and Keuka Park. Each location is included in a circle 15 miles across - birds are generally counted at fixed locations along prescribed roads within the 177 square miles enclosed by the circle.

All volunteers are welcome. Basic requirements are warm clothes, warm boots, binoculars, and a sense of adventure. The count is on regardless

of weather, so waterproof clothes are also a good bet. You don't need to be an expert at bird identification: each route has established experts who can identify the birds - your task will be to help spot the birds. Identified birds include a good mix of very common (chickadees and crows), waterfowl (ducks, geese, and mergansers), elegant (bald eagles and cranes) and rare visitors from the far north (snowy and great grey owls rarely).

It's a fun day and you'll learn a lot. Usually hot drinks and a hot meal are associated with the count. The information is used to monitor the health, status, and distribution of bird populations and individual species, e.g. current information may be used to provide more understanding into bird diseases like the West Nile virus. Changes in population levels of individual species over time and space are part of the assessment process.

Information on the date, time, start place and contact person for the Keuka Lake routes will be available soon. To find out, go to the Audubon Society web-site (www.audubon.org/bird/cbc) and click on the [get involved](#) link. Or, contact Dave deCalesta by phone (607-292-6078) or e-mail Cwildana@earthlink.net.

