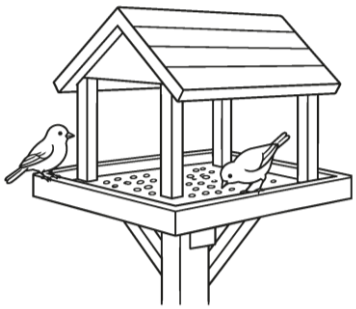
AUDUBON CBC

Feeder Watching Protocol

Quick Start Guide



The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is an annual community science project that tracks bird populations across the Americas and the Pacific. For more information about the CBC's history and purpose, visit our website or see the CBC Guide.

There are two primary ways to participate in the Christmas Bird Count:

- **Feeder Watcher** – Count birds at a bird feeder located within the circle, often in your own yard.
- **Field Count Participant** – Join a counting party to count birds in specific areas or routes within a CBC circle. A counting party is two or more individuals observing together.

This quick guide provides the essential information you need to participate successfully as a feeder watcher on count day.

Here is how to participate as a feeder watcher:

- **Sign up:** Sign up for the count and review information provided by the count Compiler or other CBC circle leader prior to count day. Confirming your location will ensure that you are situated within the count circle and that field counters know not to double-count birds in your area.
- **Record:** On count day, record
    - **Birds:** All bird species and numbers in your feeder area while avoiding double-counting. See **Tips** below for details on counting your feeder birds accurately. Record only between midnight and 11:59pm on the count day for your circle.
    - **Effort:** The start and end time, number of counters, and total number of hours you or your group collectively spent actively watching or listening for birds at your feeders. Please report only active counting, not casual counting while you are focused on something else, unless you report an incidental sighting separately. If you are counting as a group, effort is recorded at the group level (e.g. 1 hour total), not by adding up individual contributions (e.g. 1 hour each).
- **Submit:** Once you are done, submit your data as instructed. You may be asked to fill out the CBC data submission form, share eBird lists (if you use eBird), or send data directly to your Compiler.

Tips for CBC feeder counters:

- **Which birds to count**: Count all individuals that you hear or see, including species that you see or hear but may not be on your feeder (e.g., a Cooper's Hawk watching from a fence post). If using eBird, you can include birds that fly high over your count site (like Sandhill Cranes) as long as you note them as such in the comments.
- **Avoid double-counting**: Some birds like to visit feeders over and over throughout the day. To avoid artificially inflating your count numbers, record only the largest number of individuals of each species you hear or see at any one time over the count period. Do not add counts together; the largest number of individuals seen or heard at the same time will be your final tally for that species.
- **Sexually dimorphic species (males and females of the same species that have different physical appearances)**: Use the method described above of recording only the largest number of individuals seen and heard simultaneously, even for species where males and females look different and a male and female appear at different times. For CBC species data to be comparable, participants must follow the exact same counting procedure for all species.
- **Document rare sightings**: Take detailed notes (voice notes work well!) and obtain photo, video, or audio recording of any rare, unusual, or unexpected birds encountered and submit them to your Compiler. Your Sector Leader or Compiler can help you determine what might need more documentation.
- **Counting large flocks**: To estimate the number of birds in a flock, use the "blocking" method. First, count the birds in an imaginary block of typical density (like 10-25 birds). Then visually superimpose the block onto the entire flock, estimate how many times it fits, and multiply this number by the number of birds in the original block.
- **Similar species**: Some species, like Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees, are difficult to tell apart. If you live in an area where ranges of similar species overlap and you are uncertain of which species you are viewing, first consult others if possible. If specific identification is not possible (i.e. no photos or audio), record your observation at the species level (e.g., chickadee sp.).
- **Using eBird or Nature Counts to collect data:**
    - If your Compiler endorses the use of eBird or NatureCounts for collecting data on a given count, please follow the appropriate guidance for using these applications.

Thank you for participating in the annual Christmas Bird Count and supporting the conservation of birds throughout the Americas!

For more information, visit christmasbirdcount.org.

Illustrations: Diego Cobos