

## 2011 Christmas Bird Counts

By Tom Morris, David Plunkett, Tom Taroni, and Neal McLain



The Audubon Christmas Counts is a North-, Central-, and South-American campaign to count as many birds and species within a fixed circle fifteen miles in diameter. The first Christmas Count was in the Northeast in 1900 on Christmas Day. The counts were started to counter a popular "sport" of killing as many birds as one could on Christmas Day.

The data from the counts is compiled in a database and results are printed annually and the raw data is available to researchers and amateurs. Population trends have been used to help protect species that show marked decreases. One of those species is the Piping Plover, which winters in our area.

During these counts, we typically meet early in the morning, around 6:30 am and work in small groups with at least one knowledgeable birder in each group. Each group covers a specified territory in the morning, and usually covers another in the afternoon, with a break for lunch. Each group includes at least one knowledgeable birder to assist with identification. Less-experienced birders thus have an opportunity learn from more-experienced colleagues.

A typical count day requires a lot of walking — 2 to 3 miles — and you are exposed to the elements a good part of the day. However, in case of bad weather such as rain, we resort to birding by car.

In the evening we meet at a "countdown" to eat and tally results. Good hiking shoes, hat, rain gear, repellent, layers, water, light snacks, and binoculars are the basics.

Less experienced birders are welcome to participate. If you wish to participate, please contact the Count Coordinator (listed below) as soon as possible. The coordinator will assign you to a specific group, and let you know where to meet your group on the morning of the count.

There is a \$5.00 fee charged by the National Audubon Society for each individual who participates. These fees fund the program and help to cover the costs of generating materials for compilers, producing an annual CBC summary issue, and maintaining the CBC website and database. There is no fee for persons 18 years old and under. In some cases the CBC is sponsored by a local Audubon chapter or other organization, and the participants do not need to pay a fee.

Every Bird Count is named for something — a city, a park, or some geographic feature — located inside the 15-mile-diameter circle. These names can sometimes be confusing. For example, the Brazoria Bird Count is named for the City of Brazoria, but it includes a larger area. Similarly, the Freeport Bird Count is named for Freeport, but it also includes a much larger area.

There is a big advantage with more eyes and ears in the field.

If you need further information, please contact one of the following:

Jim Renfro  
979-297-2119  
[jrenfro@hcecwildblue.com](mailto:jrenfro@hcecwildblue.com)

Tom Morris  
979-297-4678  
[tmorris44@comcast.net](mailto:tmorris44@comcast.net)

**TMN-COT Members please note**

Bird Counts listed below are supported by the Houston Audubon Society and are accredited by the National Audubon Society. Participation in any Audubon-accredited bird count is approved for volunteer hours provided that you **sign in, pay the entrance fee, and participate in the counting activity.** "Counting activity" includes all time spent in the field plus training meetings, travel among count sites (if any), meals, and the countdown.

Current members may claim all hours as volunteer time. Subject to the approval of the training director, interns may claim up to 2:00 hours toward initial certification. Additional hours count as volunteer time.

All members may claim round-trip travel time to/from the meeting point, not to exceed the total number of hours claimed as volunteer time and intern training.

Please code your timesheet (in the "partners and events" column) as "other".

Following are the major bird counts in Brazoria County. For more counts, see:

- Houston Audubon Bird Count List <http://tinyurl.com/798h4w3>
- TMN-COT/FOBWR Bird Count List <http://refugefriends.org/BirdCounts/>

## **SAN BERNARD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

### **Friday, December 16, 2011**

Come join us for the 27th annual San Bernard NWR CBC. This unique count provides opportunities to bird areas of the refuge not normally open to the public, including a newly-acquired tract along the west end of CR306, the Bludworth tract along Cacklebur Slough (2003 acquisition) and the nearby McNeill tract which now boasts San Bernard Oak, the official state champion Live Oak.

Also open for counters is the TPBD Nannie M. Stringfellow Wildlife Management Area. We have rail buggy slots open for those hoping to see Yellow and possibly even Black Rails.

It will be interesting to see how we do this year given the drought.

This count also claims some of the best hospitality around with the refuge staff providing an air boat, rail buggy, and 4WD trucks.

We will have our historic chefs, Ron Bisbee, Marty Cornell, heading up the team cooking the famous countdown dinner of seafood gumbo!

Although this count still provides the small count atmosphere, it has plenty of big count diversity with 190 or more species most years. You can join us by contacting either of the co-compilers below or by showing up at the refuge headquarters on CR306 at 0630 hours the morning of Dec. 16

Coordinators/Co-compilers:

Ron Weeks - [ronweeks@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ronweeks@sbcglobal.net) - 979-299-0066 (evening)

Jennifer Wilson - [jennifer\\_wilson@fws.gov](mailto:jennifer_wilson@fws.gov) - 979-964-4011 (weekdays)

Road map (SBNWR): <http://g.co/maps/d5a6v>

Road Map (NMSWMA): <http://g.co/maps/uhm6q>

## BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK Saturday, December 17, 2011

Participation in this important event increases each year and your support is most appreciated. Now in our 27th year, we encourage participants young and old, and all levels of experience to join the fun. Strong

leadership will be assigned for all groups and the park entry fee is waived for participants.

A countdown dinner will follow the count including the award of the "Big Bird" for the outstanding sighting during the event.

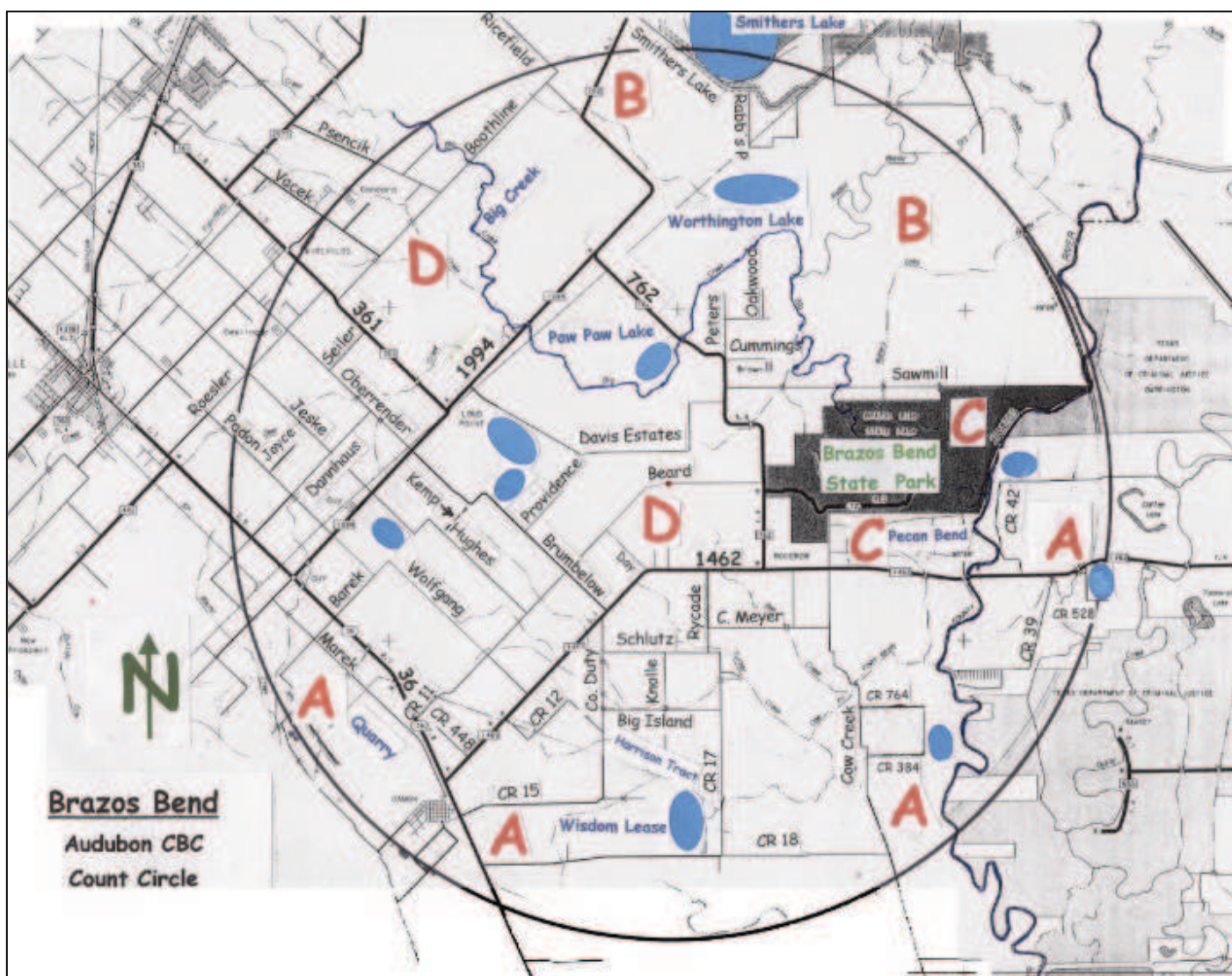
Coordinators/Co-compilers:

Bill Godley - [fribbish@msn.com](mailto:fribbish@msn.com) - 281-341-6684

Justin Bower - [jbower47@hotmail.com](mailto:jbower47@hotmail.com) - 281-293-7389

Road Map: <http://g.co/maps/rrzzz>

Flier: <http://refugefriends.org/BirdCounts/BBSP-Flier.pdf>



## FREEPORT BIRD COUNT Sunday, December 18, 2011

The count is consistently one of the top ten in the country and finds the largest number of species of any on the Upper Texas Coast. Habitat includes seashore, barrier islands,

prairie and woodland. The circle is divided into eight areas, each with its own leader and unique habitats.

Coordinator/Compiler:  
Mike Austin - [mj\\_eh@comcast.net](mailto:mj_eh@comcast.net)



## BRAZORIA BIRD COUNT

### Saturday, December 31, 2011

The Brazoria CBC includes Bar-X Ranch, Columbia Lakes, Hudson Woods unit of SBNWR, Brazoria Reservoir, Harris Reservoir, and southern Nash Ranch

This count was done from 1984-1994 by the Brazosport Birders. In 2009, the count was successfully revived with 45 participants and 145 species recorded.

Countdown will take place at 4:00 pm at:  
**Belle's Landing** (*not to be confused with Bell's Landing*)  
11937 Hwy 35 (*just east of the Brazos River Bridge*)  
West Columbia, TX 77486  
979-345-2628  
<http://belleslanding.com>  
Map: <http://g.co/maps/mxzxx>

Coordinator/Compiler:  
Tom Taroni  
[taroni@comcast.net](mailto:taroni@comcast.net)  
979-297-5563 Cell  
979-266-9962 Home

