



Phone 863.465.2571  
123 MAIN DRIVE ★ VENUS, FLORIDA 33960

To: Highlands News-Sun

From: Archbold Biological Station

Date Published: January 19, 2018

Author: Archbold Biological Station

### **Archbold staff and the Christmas Bird Count**

The holiday season is one filled with tradition for many families. For birders and general staff at Archbold Biological Station, one such tradition is participating in an Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Since the first count on Christmas Day of 1900, initiated by Frank M. Chapman, the Curator of Mammals and Birds at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, observers throughout the country have been identifying and counting the birds they see as part of this annual tradition. According to the Audubon's society's webpage, these counts contribute to "a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years."

Almost 800 separate Christmas Bird Counts occurred across the U.S. in 2017. Dr. Angela Tringali, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in the Avian Ecology Program at Archbold, explains, "Each count occurs within a fixed circle that is 15 miles in diameter and must be completed within a 24-hour period between December 14 and January 5. For optimum coverage of such a large area, compilers of each count strive to organize at least ten observers for at least eight hours. Each bird that can be identified to species is counted and recorded."

This year marked the 31<sup>st</sup> Lake Placid count, which took place on December 29, 2017. Tringali notes, "A total of 138 bird species were seen, the highlight of which were two Snow Geese—a rarity for this part of Florida." The number of bird species seen annually on the count has ranged from 131–155, with an average of 33 people coming together from different agencies and areas of the state to participate.

Scientists at Archbold Biological Station have participated in local Christmas Bird Counts annually since 1988. Fred E. Lohrer, Archbold Librarian and Historian was the first compiler of the Lake Placid Christmas Bird Count, and was succeeded by Glen E. Woolfenden, former Director of the Avian Ecology Program at Archbold. Currently, Jon Greenlaw compiles the count, with Archbold staff participating. Tringali says, "I look forward to participating in the Lake Placid Christmas Bird Count every year. It gives me the opportunity to meet and learn from birders in the community and explore natural areas outside of Archbold lands."

Partnerships between Audubon and private landowners, such as Archbold Biological Station and local landowners, contribute to the high number of species seen on the Lake Placid Christmas Bird Count. Dr. Reed Bowman, Director of the Avian Ecology Program at Archbold, states, "Each year, several local ranchers give permission for participants to search for birds on their lands. Local ranches are very important as they contribute a great diversity of habitats and birds. This year, we saw 101 species on the Scarborough Ranch, over 70% of the total species seen on the entire count. This is pretty amazing for just one site." Jon Greenlaw notes, "The ranchers' support is especially appreciated, as their ranches contribute critically to the success of the Lake Placid count."

Archbold staff also participate annually in the Avon Park Air Force Range Christmas Bird Count, which took place on January 2, 2018. First started in 1993, this count encompasses the majority of the 104,000-acre active military range, including parts of Lake Arbuckle. Emily Angell, Research Assistant at Archbold, states, "This year, a total of 98 species were seen, though historically the number has ranged from 88–118. The number of species counted in any given year is largely dependent on weather conditions, as well as the number of participants (which averages 22 people for the Avon Park count)." Troy Hershberger, a biologist employed by the US Air Force, says, "The Avon Park Christmas Bird Count is a great example of the partnership that exists between Archbold and the US military."

Angell, who works at the range, states that "The number of bird species seen annually during both the Lake Placid and Avon Park Christmas Bird Counts is really a testament to the variety and quality of habitats being preserved on both private and public lands in this part of Florida. Nationwide, the results of Christmas Bird Counts can be used as a meter stick to measure how bird populations are fluctuating from year to year, both by species and by region."

Nearly ninety years before the phrase "citizen science" entered the public lexicon, The Audubon Society endeavored to organize what is now the nation's longest-running community-driven bird project. According to the Audubon Society webpage, the results of these counts have been included in over 200 published scientific papers. The scientists and staff at Archbold Biological Station are proud to take part in this long and important tradition, and encourage anyone interested in birds or conservation to make the Christmas Bird Count part of their annual traditions.

For more information about Christmas Bird Counts, including results and how to get involved, visit <http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>

**Photo 1: Emily Angell uses a spotting scope to look for birds on the surface of Lake June-in-Winter in Lake Placid. Photo by Archbold Biological Station.**

