

News Release

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

P.O. Box 62 Chincoteague Island, VA 23336

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jenny Howard Owen, Volunteer Coordinator

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Phone: 757-336-6122

Backyard Birds are Celebrated at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

With our region's mild winter weather, more and more people are seeking opportunities to enjoy the out-of-doors or to get out and enjoy public lands such as our national wildlife refuges. The 15th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) offers a chance to do both! Taking place in backyards and nature centers throughout North America, the GBBC will be celebrated locally at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), from February 17-20, 2012.

At Chincoteague NWR, volunteers will be on hand to tally and discuss the species in the backyard bird garden of the Herbert H. Bateman Educational Center. As seasoned local birdwatchers, knowledgeable about local bird species, native plants, and bird-feeding tips, these volunteers will share stories of the species they observe while providing more information to visitors on creating backyard habitats.

The four-day event is open to bird watchers of all ages and skill levels. Participants watch birds for any length of time on one or more days of the count and enter their tallies (at no charge) at www.birdcount.org. From reports of rare species to large-scale tracking of bird movements, the GBBC provides insight into the lives of birds. The results provide a snapshot of the whereabouts of more than 600 bird species. Citizen participants become scientists, just by counting and observing.

"This bird count offers individuals and families a chance to learn more about the winter visitors to their backyard," said Kevin Holcomb, Refuge Biologist at Chincoteague NWR, "while also providing valuable data to scientists and conservation researchers."

Mid-February is chosen as the time for the Great Backyard Bird Count because it offers a good picture of the birds typically found throughout the winter months. It also coincides with migration for some species, such as egrets or marsh birds. That window of transition affords an opportunity to detect changes in timing for northward migration.

On the www.birdcount.org website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Participants may also enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images taken during the count. Many images will be featured in the GBBC website's photo gallery. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products.

The GBBC is a joint project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada. For additional details on the Refuge's GBBC event at the Herbert H. Bateman Educational Center, call 757-336-6122 or visit <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/chinco/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.