



Ways to Involve Kids

The Great Backyard Bird Count has engaged hundreds of classes and youth groups, who enjoyed participating and putting their zip code on the map as they contributed valuable scientific data. These groups chose several different methods of participation according to the needs and abilities of their young members. An overview of these ways to involve kids in the Great Backyard Bird Count may be helpful to first-time participants and may provide returnees with new ideas.

The Entire Group - Some classes or youth groups approach the Great Backyard Bird Count as a group project. Guided by the teacher or leader, the entire group learns, observes, and reports as one. The group studies local birds during the months before the count. Bird feeding areas are set up or bird observation sites are scouted. Then, on one or more days during the count period, the entire group gets together to identify and count the birds in a particular location or along a planned route. After the count (or "counts" if the group meets on more than one day), one individual (usually the teacher or leader) submits the data to BirdSource for the entire group. This "Entire Group" approach works well with young children or beginning bird watchers who are unfamiliar with local birdlife.

Small Groups – Children and students who are more advanced bird watchers and independent observers may be subdivided into small groups of from two to five. The teacher or leader should be sure that the kids with the most bird watching skill and knowledge are spread throughout the different groups. As with the "Entire Group" approach, the adult coordinator should give local bird identification instruction, organize the setting up of feeder areas or observation routes, and teach the counting process. On the day or days of the count, the small groups identify and count birds in separate, pre-established sites. They then come back together to compare their results and submit one report per small group, again guided by the leader or teacher. This way, the group monitors a much larger territory and gains some experience in conducting an independent survey.

Individuals - The most independent and experienced youth groups and classes may want to prepare for the GBBC together, but participate as individuals. A review of local species by a leader/facilitator is always helpful. Count protocol should be explained. Count areas should be mapped to avoid overlap within the group and with heavily birded areas. Then on the selected day or days of the count weekend, young people identify and count the birds they encounter in their respective areas. If they

have personal access to the Internet and are familiar with the web site, they may be able to enter data independently. Some young folks may need the assistance of teachers, leaders, or friends in completing this step. This approach gives us additional valuable coverage and encourages independent observation.

Families - A most successful approach to the Great Backyard Bird Count involves outreach to the families of the youngsters. The young people (of all ages) are taught the identification skills and counting protocol. In some cases, they even build feeders. They then take the materials home to their individual backyards and conduct the event with their family's help. Some of these families will be able to submit their own data. Others will need help with submission from a teacher, friend, or leader. This approach promotes family outreach and multi-generational connections as well as broad monitoring of bird populations. Parents or grandparents who know the birds can partner with their kids or grandkids who have mastered the Web.

Points to Remember -

- 1) Every bird does not have to be identified or counted. Identify and count what you can for as long as you can. When you submit your results, be as accurate as possible about the amount of time you spent watching. If you only identified and counted some of the species you saw, mark the statement that says: **"I'm NOT reporting every species I saw"**
- 2) There are no winning numbers. Accuracy and consistency determine the winners. Low numbers, "0," or no reports are often more important to conservation efforts than big numbers.
- 3) Our goal is to keep common birds common, so count all birds, whether common or unusual, carefully.
- 4) The number you report for each species you observe should be the **largest number of that species that you see at one time at that site**. If you go to several different sites, you should submit them as different counts.
- 5) If you count on several different days, each day's count must be submitted separately.
- 6) Be sure to fill out the questions at the beginning of the checklist carefully. This information makes the data you submit much more valuable.

You will help us fully if you will fill out the questionnaire that you encounter after you have submitted data. This helps us to know our audience and to raise money for future studies. We will not release any of the information that you give us unless we receive your specific permission.