

# Postponed bird count results in smaller volunteer turnout

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Heavy rains that created muddy roads caused the postponement of the annual Christmas bird count at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge until Jan. 4, about the date of the Orthodox Christmas Jan. 7.

The forced rescheduling from the count originally planned in mid-December, resulted in a lower turnout of volunteers, but the birds still turned out in decent numbers.

Volunteers counted 1,341 birds from 62 different species during the day-long event.

The highlights of the count included a flock of 10 sandhill cranes, a mountain chickadee, a rough-legged hawk, a golden eagle and an orange-crowned warbler.

Game birds like the Gambel's quail and blue-winged teal were plentiful and found in high numbers.

But volunteers reported many of the shorebirds and waders that are typical of the count were missing from the refuge that day, probably due to ice on the marshes and shallow water, refuge national resource coordinator Sam Skalek said.

Numbers were down significantly from the 3,266 birds and 72 species counted in the 2011 count, which included a peregrine falcon and great horned owl, observed under windy conditions. In 2009, volunteers counted 4,926 birds.

The 23,448-acre Ash Meadows NWR is home to at least 26 plant and animal species found nowhere else. Over 239 bird species have been recorded.

The best times to observe birds on the refuge is usually during the spring



A flock of 10 sandhill cranes was spotted at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge during the annual Christmas Bird Count on Jan. 4.

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migration in April and May or the fall migration, from mid-August through September.

Mesquite and ash trees around the refuge headquarters and at Point of Rocks harbor many resident and migratory birds, including typical southwestern species like the Crissal thrasher, verdin, phainopepla and Lucy's warbler.

Endangered southwestern willow flycatchers use the refuge as breeding habitat in the summer months, while endangered species success stories like the peregrine falcon and bald eagle occasionally stop at the refuge on migrations.

The Christmas Bird Count is a long-standing citizen science project coordinated by the National Audubon

Society. The annual Ash Meadows count began in 1995.

The data is used to track long-term population trends of wintering North American bird species.

In addition, the program offers volunteers, bird watchers and others a chance to collect and record important bird data on the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.

## List of the species of the birds spotted and their numbers

American Coot 240  
Ruddy duck 150  
White-crowned sparrow 143  
Green-winged teal 134  
Gambel's quail 70  
Song sparrow 59  
Lesser goldfinch 57  
Northern pintail 53  
Blue-winged teal 38  
Northern shoveler 32  
Common raven 31  
Phainopepla 28

American tree sparrow 20  
Marsh wren 19  
Sage sparrow 19  
Brewers blackbird 18  
American widgeon 16  
Western meadowlark 15  
Horned lark 15  
Mallard 14  
Northern harrier 14  
American pipit 12  
Sandhill crane 10  
Verdin 10

Redhead 8  
House finch 8  
Loggerhead shrike 8  
Canvasback 7  
Bufflehead 7  
Black-tailed gnatcatcher 7  
Pied-billed grebe 6  
Gadwall 6  
Ruby-crowned kinglet 6  
Ring-billed gull 5  
Crissal thrasher 5  
Red-shafted northern flicker 5

Bewick's wren 5  
Black phoebe 4  
Western bluebird 4  
Great-blue heron 4  
Virginia rail 3  
Common merganser 2  
Red-tailed hawk 2  
Greatest roadrunner 2  
American bittern 2  
Bushtit 2  
Rock wren 1  
Least bittern 1

Northern mockingbird 1  
Coopers hawk 1  
Rough-legged hawk 1  
Ferruginous hawk 1  
Golden eagle 1  
Prairie falcon 1  
Lesser scaup 1  
Eared grebe 1  
Killdeer 1  
Least sandpiper 1  
Wilson's snipe 1  
Mountain chickadee 1  
Orange-crowned warbler 1