



# Great Backyard Bird Count



## The Do's and Don'ts of Promoting the Great Backyard Bird Count

As pointed out in the overview of this Classroom Activity Kit, any of the suggested activities can be used year-round. A key goal of course is the encouragement of student participation in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count, held each year on the second weekend in February, and is one of the activities listed for each grade level. We very much appreciate teachers' efforts to promote this participation but would ask each teacher to consider the following do's and don'ts when promoting participation in the event itself.

### Do's

- Encourage students to make their observations at home or in and around their neighborhoods. Observations made at school as part of class time are fine, but a major goal of the Great Backyard Bird Count is to encourage bird observations at home.
- If observations (and subsequent reports) are made as a group at school, these observations represent a single report – NOT separate reports for each student. The reporting form has a place to report how many persons assisted in the count being reported.
- Encourage students to make or obtain a bird feeder and maintain it at home. As with encouraging home observations, this activity will hopefully generate a life-long interest in birds and backyard wildlife.
- Encourage students to be diligent about collecting and reporting ACCURATE and TRUTHFUL information about their observations. Please point out the following to students:
  - It is OK to admit that they are beginner birders or that they did not identify every bird they saw (they can report their ability level and whether or not they reported all birds on the report form submitted with their data)
  - It is OK that they may only see a few birds or only a few kinds of birds during their count period. All of this is perfectly good information that will contribute greatly to understanding the status of the bird populations that they observe.
  - It is NOT OK to make data up, guess about the identify of a bird, or report false information. It is important to instill in these young people the value of collecting whatever information that is observed and reporting this information as accurately as possible. THIS IS WHAT CITIZEN SCIENCE is all about. A key goal of the Great Backyard Bird Count is to encourage youth to become Citizen Scientists and help Audubon and its partners learn more about the status of North American bird populations.

## Don'ts

- Please **DO NOT** make participation in the Great Backyard Bird Count an assignment for a grade. This may only encourage students to make up data either because they “forgot” to do the assignment or because they want a “better” grade. Either way this approach would defeat the purpose of collecting data in the first place and, more importantly, discourage students from participating for science sake. Remember, we are trying to train and encourage a new generation of Citizen Scientists.
- If at all possible, Do Not submit reports for students. A key part of being a Citizen Scientist is the reporting of one's data. In many ways, this is the “feel good” part of conducting a census, in that, the person reporting feels that they have completed the task and contributed to the effort by sending in the report themselves. In the event that a student does not have access to a computer at home, please arrange for students to use school computers. Many public libraries also have computers with internet access that can be used by a student to submit a report.

**REMEMBER**, reports can be submitted up to two weeks after the last day of the annual count.

Good Luck and THANKS for helping to inspire our future generation of naturalists.