

# Leading Citizen Science

The early Auduboners pioneered the idea of Citizen Science with the first Christmas Bird Count more than a century ago. Today, the longest-running wildlife census in the world is only one way in which Audubon is harnessing the passion of committed volunteers. Each provides scientists and conservationists with vital information about bird populations and trends, data that offers early warning of environmental threats, not only to birds but also to the larger ecosystems they—and all of us—depend on.



## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

In 2009, tens of thousands of volunteers in all 50 states, Canada (where Audubon partners with Bird Studies Canada), the Caribbean, eleven Latin American countries, and four Pacific islands counted more than 55 million birds in more than 2,100 local counts. What makes the Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) most important is the long-term trend analysis it makes possible. Thanks to generations of volunteers and the count's online database, scientists around the globe have more than 100 years of data on many of the Western Hemisphere's wintering birds literally at their fingertips.

Audubon's analysis of CBC data is instrumental to the U.S. State of the Birds Reports, produced by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) under the leadership of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The widely-covered 2010 report confirmed that climate change poses a grim threat to many U.S. birds—especially coastal and ocean species—and served as a rallying cry for efforts to mitigate and reduce the impact of this unprecedented threat.

## GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Held each February in partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Great Backyard Bird Count introduces thousands of children, families, and others to citizen science. It also engages experienced birders in collecting data that helps provide a snapshot of bird populations and trends. This year's count saw record participation, with nearly 100,000 checklists submitted from all 50 U.S. states, and all 10 provinces and 3 territories of Canada. Patterns detected in GBBC data alert scientists to particular questions or concerns requiring further investigation.

**Left: Los Angeles Audubon Society's Stacey Vigallon (left) and University of California-Santa Barbara's Christina Sandoval lead citizen scientists in protecting habitat for Snowy Plovers and other species.**



**Paul W. Sykes Jr.**  
Christmas Bird Count Veteran

A birder for 63 years and a participant in the Christmas Bird Count for the past 59 years, Paul is the first person to have participated in 400 Christmas Bird Counts! (The Georgia resident takes part in multiple counts each year, and has traveled from Dry Tortugas, Florida to Ocean City, Maryland to do it.) A retired U.S. Department of the Interior wildlife research biologist and scientist emeritus of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, his ongoing research includes studies on the survival, longevity, and site fidelity of the eastern population of the Painted Bunting from North Carolina to Florida. "During my early CBC years, I had no idea the count would become a lifelong pursuit," Sykes recalled. "But my interest has never diminished, and I look forward to taking part in many more CBCs!"

## CONSERVATION IMPACT

- ▶ Led the 110th Audubon Christmas Bird Count, engaging tens of thousands of volunteers in collecting vital information for conservation
- ▶ Played a lead role in the North American Bird Conservation Initiative's 2010 *State of the Birds* report on birds and climate change
- ▶ Achieved record participation in the Great Backyard Bird Count in 2010, with nearly 100,000 checklists
- ▶ Monitored the impact of the BP Gulf oil disaster on birds through eBird and other initiatives

## eBIRD

Launched in 2002 by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, eBird enlists recreational birders and science professionals alike to enter their bird observations at ebird.org. Each contributes to a network of observations throughout the Western Hemisphere, accessible to a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists. When the BP oil disaster struck the Gulf this summer, eBird was a ready platform for monitoring bird populations throughout the crisis. Data from eBird is also the foundation for **Audubon California's** current study of Yellow-billed Magpies, an endemic California species that is particularly susceptible to climate change impacts.