

Naturalists collect important data during Christmas Bird Count



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By Nate Smelle

Members of the Bancroft Field Naturalist Club came together on the freezing rainy morning of Saturday, Dec. 14 to conduct their annual Christmas Bird Count. Initially launched in 1900 by the National Audubon Society, the Christmas Bird Count is North America's longest-running citizen science project. The annual survey brings together thousands of volunteers from over 2,000 communities throughout the Western Hemisphere to collect important data on resident and migrating bird species.

President of the Naturalists Club in Bancroft Terry Bradt said the club has been participating in the study organized nationally by Bird Studies Canada since 1996. He explained that each Christmas Bird Count takes place on a single day between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5 within the same 24-kilometre diameter circle every year. Although the final results of the study for 2019 in the Bancroft area will not be available until early in the new year, Bradt said this year's counters recorded sightings of 24 different species. Some of the more notable species observed during the 2019 count include: Carolina wren; belted kingfisher; northern cardinal; and, three bald eagles soaring over Dungannon. To gather as much data as possible within the designated study area during the count, Bradt said the club also depends on observations provided by participants in Bird Studies Canada's Project FeederWatch.

"I can't stress enough how much we rely on feeder watchers," Bradt said.

"We have a limited number of people that can actually participate on the day of the count; and when there is bad weather like this year it can make it even more difficult. The feeder watchers help us collect more information from their backyards and other places that we can't see from the road so they are very important."

Noting that the results of the Christmas Bird Count are used on a regular basis by conservation biologists and naturalists to assess the population trends and distribution of birds, Bradt said it is very important that the count continues. Helping to increase awareness of resident biodiversity through environmental education is one of the main objectives of the Bancroft Field Naturalists Club, he explained. Each year the Christmas Bird Count is an excellent opportunity to accomplish this, he said.

"If we don't know what we have how can we protect it?" asked Bradt.

With a special presentation from Bark Lake Leadership and Conference Centre's outdoor education program manager, Joe Fortin scheduled for Jan. 13, the club is not wasting any time in its efforts to educate the public about the value of understanding nature in 2020. Bradt said Fortin's presentation will be the first in a series to take place on the second Monday of each month at the Bancroft Fish and Game Club starting at 7 p.m. Admission is free.

For more information on the Bancroft Field Naturalist Club's activities, and how to join, visit their website at: www.bfnc.ca; or check out their Facebook page.