

Highlights from Power Point on Christmas Bird Counts from AZFO

Before Count Day

- Know your assigned area – have good maps and multiple copies.
- Review your assigned area via Google Earth.
- Access – obtain needed permission for key areas.
- Varied habitats – need to visit them all count day.
- Bodies of water and marshes particularly important.

Scouting – Many Benefits

- Determine if any access has changed or if permission is needed for certain key areas.
- Determine where concentrations of birds are and the best area to start or end your day.
- Find rare or elusive birds that you can make a special effort in relocating count day.
- Count Week Birds:
 - Not found count day, but 3 days before or after
 - Important to round out species likely within count circle
 - Important if poor weather count day such as high wind or rain/snow as even regular species can easily be missed

Where to begin and end your day

- May depend on what was found during scouting
- Cold early mornings - eastern edges of stands of trees warm first so often have more bird activity
- Bodies of water attracts birds throughout the day, so if possible visit them several times, particularly early in morning and near sunset
- Cattail/bulrush marshes often have huge roosting flocks of blackbirds and swallows - be there at dawn to count them exiting or within an hour of sunset to count them returning
- Swallows are often most active over bodies of water within an hour of sunset

Owling/Rail calling – Heard birds count!

- Calling for most owls and rails one to two hours before sunrise best
- Smaller Owls
 - Western Screech-Owls – < 5000 ft.
 - Whiskered Screech-Owl - > 5000 ft. (SE only)
 - N. Pygmy-Owl – call in forests through a.m.
- Great Horned Owls often call on their own within an hour before sunrise
- Sora and Virginia Rail – cattail/bulrush stands – may respond throughout day. Loud hand clapping may also encourage response

Day Roosting Owls

- Know where to look.
- Watch for concentrations of whitewash and pellets.
 - Under bridges & in structures
 - Dense isolated trees or stands (mesquite thickets, Athel tamarisk)
 - Large mistletoe clumps
 - Hanging broken limbs with dense dry leaf clumps

Recognize Habitats

- It *looks* different
- clustered vegetation (hedges, rows, or clumps of trees)
- lush vegetation (indicating water)
- native plants
- tall trees
- blooming trees
- open fields
- Velvet Mesquite (native)
- Netleaf Hackberry
- native acacias and paloverdes
- tall or clustered pines and other conifers (apartment complexes)
- deciduous trees, especially cottonwood and pecan, but also ash, sycamore, elm
- oaks of any kind
- fruiting exotics: palms, Chinese pistache, English Ivy, Pyracantha, privet
- carob (flowers)
- eucalyptus – blooming or if with sapsucker holes
- bottle tree (*Brachychiton*) – check for sapsucker holes
- mixed ornamentals excluding “bad plants” (see below)
- Athel salt cedar
- lawns (indicating water)
- Plants to ignore: Oleander, African Sumac, mulberry, Chinaberry, Australian acacias and sennas

Mixed Foraging Flocks

- Try to find mixed, foraging flocks of passerines – rare, lingering species can often be found among them.
- Key areas are those with lots of cover, multi-structured, native vegetation and near some source of water, even a small spring or irrigation run-off.
- Even a single young cottonwood or willow in a stand of exotic residential plants can harbor rare gems among the more common Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Frequent Leaders

- Bridled and/or Juniper Titmice
- Mountain Chickadee

Regular Followers

- Warblers
- Nuthatches
- Brown Creeper
- Vireos
- Kinglets
- Blue-gray Gnatcatchers
- Flycatchers

Art of Pishing

- Make varied sounds like fussing or agitated birds.

- Stand near tree or shrub.
- *Stand still with little body movement when pishing.*
- Pishing and jointly owl call whistling or play recording.
- If you are not doing this, you are missing lots of birds – both species and numbers!
- This activity will often pull in birds you had no idea were even out there.
- Pish at edge of promising, dense habitat even when no birds are heard or seen.
- Pish loudly at first, pause to listen for immediate response.
- Can pish up to a minute with no response and then get a good bird.
- Use owl imitations/recordings that the birds are likely to recognize (Western Screech-Owl, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned)