

Four Tales from the Front Lines of the 2017 Christmas Bird Count

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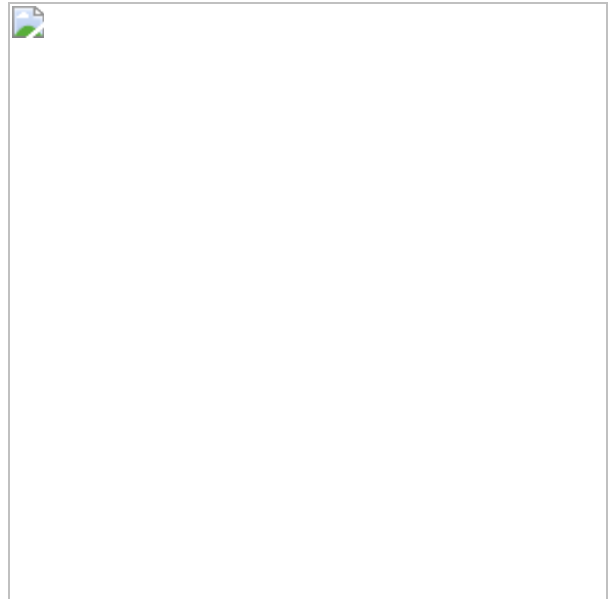
Chuck Aid

January 14, 2018

Evergreen East – Marilyn Rhodes

I had a total of eight on my team this year, including four new recruits who were wonderful additions. One of these, Amanda Wilkinson, has recently moved here from Florida and was excited at the prospect of seeing an American Dipper, a life bird for her.

Fortunately, we found three in the creek near Highland Haven and two more in by Baskin-Robbins. Each exhibited a different behavior, singing, preening, diving for food, calling while flying down the creek, and resting on a white-washed covered rock. Before seeing the dippers, we toured the Rodeo Grounds looking for raptors and shrikes. Amanda called out that she had just seen two Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays, which we'd never had on one of our CBCs. I doubted her, thinking perhaps she had seen a Steller's Jay instead. However, she was 100% sure as she had done Scrub-Jay monitoring in Florida. She was so confident, I decided to chase the birds, and we found two Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays...and a Northern Shrike while we were at it!



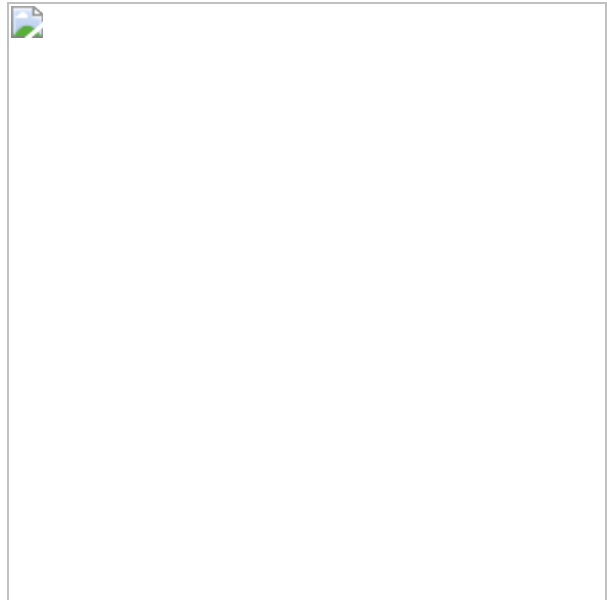
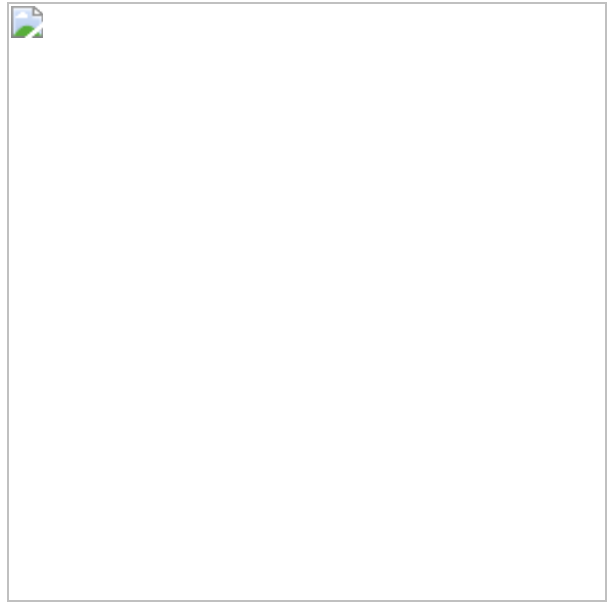
American Dipper (c) Bill Schmoker

Bob Santangelo recruited Julie Berkman, the environmental science teacher at Evergreen High, for our team. She had collaborated with Nature Center Director, Colleen Kulesza, on a grant to provide binoculars for her class, and on the day of the CBC brought her two children along, seven-year old daughter, Joss, and five-year old son, Finn. Julie thought they would get tired after a couple of hours and planned to leave when we broke for lunch. However, the kids had such a good time watching hawks, creepers, shrikes, dippers, calling for snipes, riding with Santa (Bob Santa-Angelo), and wearing Christmas headgear that they birded with us the entire day. I enjoyed teaching Finn how to locate dippers in a creek. He looked for their white wash on the rocks near Baskin-Robbins and sighted the two we saw there. The kids enjoyed watching the dippers so much, they hated to stop.

Elk Management Area – Mark Meremonte

Initially Susan Krause, Cindy Barge, and I missed each other in the morning. They went up Yankee Creek, finding several Turkeys, while I had a few Mountain Chickadees up Bear Creek. Eventually, we found one another and drove-walked up to the Ranger's home.

From that point, we piled into their Subaru, or boobaru as I like to call them, with me sitting in one of the two child seats, which suited me fine. At Homestead Meadow, we split into two parties and combed the surrounding grassland and woodland. The highlight was hearing the high peeps of Pine Grosbeaks and, finally, getting a view of them eating the seeds of spruce cones. Then, they were gone. For lunch, we enjoyed a nice rest on rocks near the best preserved of the old homestead houses overlooking the meadow. It was here in 2011 that Bud Weare, Kent Simon, and I enjoyed watching several moose trudge past in the snow. For the remainder of the day, we slowly worked our way back finding most of the expected birds, except for Dark-eyed Juncos. We did come across several Gray Jays, an elusive Brown Creeper, a Downy Woodpecker, and a single Black-capped Chickadee – a first, I believe, in the Elk Management area for a CBC. It was a beautiful, warm day and I was glad for a couple of brave birders to stalk the open woodlands with me.

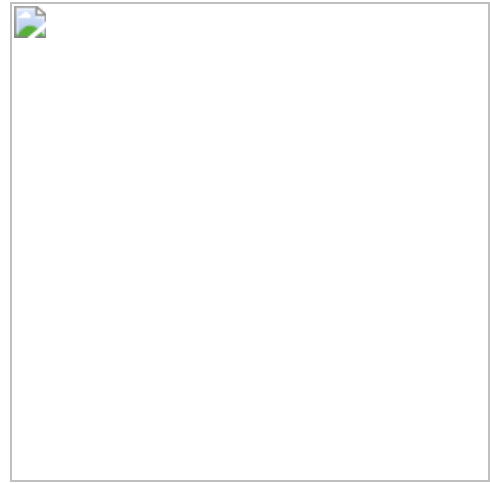


Idaho Springs West – Ben Legasse

Idaho Springs West was uncharted territory for the three of us that met in the early morning to make light of its riches. From Chicago Creek to Clear Creek, Soda Creek, Little Bear Creek, Barbour Fork and Beaver Brook, the hills, their forests and the birds that call them home kept us on our feet and excited to see what was around the bend. From the Pygmy Owl we had listened for with no success, only to see one later on the very top of a blue spruce, to the Golden Eagle being harassed by a crow as it teetered aloft riding the draft of Santa Fe Mountain, to the abundance of juncos, jays, and finches spending their days in and around the town of Idaho Springs, certainly it was a day well spent.

Clear Creek – Chuck Aid

When a CBC area leader first delves into covering new territory, the first thoughts tend to be related to getting to know the lay of the land, where is it possible to have access to public lands, figuring out how to get around and get as much of the area covered as possible in a single day, and what bird species tend to be where. So, when I first signed on six years ago to help Dave and Elaine Mongeau cover the Clear Creek section of our circle, I first familiarized myself with some of that initial logistical information, and then went on to gain access to restricted properties managed by the Black Hawk/Central City Sanitation District, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Jeffco Open Space. However, there was an important logistical piece that eluded me year after year.



Northern Pygmy Owl (c) Bill Schmoker

Finally though, this was the year that during pre-count scouting, a chance encounter with retired law-enforcement officer, Marsha Kiddoo, up on Robinson Hill Road, led to my meeting a wonderful group of enthusiastic home owners: Erika Daniels, Debbie Johnson, and Constance Reid, all excited by the prospect of counting birds at their feeders, and full of stories about turkeys, owls, and Rosy-Finches in the area. As a co-leader for this area, this was a wonderful treasure trove that opened up to me, and immediately yielded some great birds a few days later on this year's count, e.g wonderful close views of a feeding Clark's Nutcracker. Our count circle is so huge that it's a wonderful day when we get to pull in a few more folks to help with the task at hand, and who want to learn more about Evergreen Audubon.