

## **EASTERN ALAMEDA COUNTY BIRD COUNT DECEMBER 17**

*Volunteers Will Survey for Wintering Birds During New Christmas Bird Count*



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Sunol, CA** – The Ohlone Audubon Society and the Alameda Creek Alliance will host the second annual Eastern Alameda County Christmas bird count this Friday, December 17. An estimated 90 volunteer birders of all levels of experience will survey for wintering birds within a 15 mile radius count circle in the vicinity of Pleasanton, Sunol and Livermore, within the Alameda Creek watershed.

The Christmas Bird Count is an annual nationwide volunteer-based bird survey effort coordinated by the Audubon Society to promote bird conservation and assess long-term trends in winter bird populations. In the largest citizen science effort in the world, tens of thousands of volunteer birders and scientists armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists will take part in Christmas bird counts throughout the Americas from mid-December through early January. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation actions.

“We have numerous local birders, ornithologists, and public lands agency staff participating in the second Eastern Alameda bird count, and there is still room for more volunteers of any level of experience,” said Rich Cimino, Conservation Chair of the Ohlone Audubon Society, and Events Director for the Alameda Creek Alliance. “The count will contribute to bird conservation and monitoring efforts and will promote stewardship of bird populations and habitats within the Alameda Creek watershed,” added Cimino, the initiator of the Eastern Alameda bird count.

The eastern Alameda County effort will complement 15 other existing Christmas Bird Counts in the San Francisco Bay Area. The count area is in the vicinity of Sunol, Pleasanton and Livermore, and includes five East Bay Regional Parks, significant San Francisco watershed lands, and birding hotspots such as lower Mines Road, Sunol Wilderness, Del Valle Reservoir, and the Springtown area in Livermore. Volunteers will walk, bicycle, or drive count areas, or monitor backyard feeders during a 24 hour period on December 17. Additional surveys during the count week of December 14 to 20 will locate, identify, and record rare bird species. The surveys will be non-intrusive observations of birds, with volunteers following an ethics code to avoid any impacts to birds or habitats.

Highlight species found during the inaugural count in 2009 included a pair of bald eagles, well over 20 golden eagles, 3 peregrine falcons, 3 prairie falcons, 7 northern pygmy-owls, 1 short-eared owl, 1 burrowing owl, 1 Lewis' woodpecker, 176 yellow-billed magpies, 14 rock wrens, 1 canyon wren, 90 tri-colored blackbirds, and several uncommon sparrows (17 rufous-crowned, 88 lark, 3 vesper, and 2 grasshopper sparrows).

Notable birds in the count area include yellow-billed magpies, which are endemic to central California and have declined due to West Nile virus and loss of oak woodland habitat; bald eagles, which only recently began breeding in the Bay Area and have just been removed from the endangered species list; golden eagles, which are threatened locally by collisions with wind turbines at Altamont Pass; western burrowing owls, declining rapidly in the Bay Area due to habitat loss from urban development and also killed in large numbers by Altamont wind turbines; and Lewis' woodpeckers, brightly colored denizens of open-canopy forests that are a state species of special concern.

The history of the Christmas Bird Count has its roots in opposition to an early American holiday tradition known as Christmas "side hunts," where teams would compete to see who could shoot more wildlife and come back with the biggest pile of dead birds. Conservationists and scientists concerned about declining bird populations proposed a new holiday tradition beginning on Christmas Day 1900, a "Christmas Bird Count" that would tally birds rather than hunt them.

Birders and volunteers with any level of experience can participate and are assigned to teams based on their bird identification skill level and endurance. The count circle is divided into over two dozen sections, each with a leading birder with specific knowledge of the area. To get involved, visit [ohloneaudubon.org](http://ohloneaudubon.org) or [www.alamedacreek.org](http://www.alamedacreek.org).

*The Ohlone Audubon Society is chapter of the national Audubon Society serving southern Alameda County that works to preserve the natural world through education, conservation, and advocacy. The Alameda Creek Alliance is a community watershed group with over 1,800 members, dedicated to protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek watershed.*