

# Nature Happenings

## Join in Moab's Annual Christmas Bird Count

by Damian Fagan

Moab's annual Christmas Bird Count, better known as the CBC, takes place in Moab on December 14. Better known as the CBC, this is a fun opportunity for avian enthusiasts to contribute to one of the longest-running community science projects in the nation. The count provides a snapshot of winter bird populations across the Americas and Canada, and allows researchers to track avian population changes that might be triggered by climate change, habitat destruction, prey availability, or other environmental or human-caused issues.

This year marks the 125th year of the count which started back in 1900 as an alternative holiday event to one that centered on the wanton destruction of wildlife. In contrast to that first year when 25 people participated, the 2023 Christmas Bird Count had over 83,000 participants and they recorded 2380 species across Canada, the U.S., Latin America, the Pacific Islands, and in the Caribbean.



The CBC lasts for 7 days, with three days prior and three days post Count Day spent looking for species missed on Count Day. A predetermined Count Circle with a 15-mile radius is divided up into sections that individuals or small groups scour for birds on Count Day. Species observed during Count Week but not Count Day are added to the final tally as just individuals of a species, no population numbers are added. Count Week provides for an opportunity to capture highly migratory or difficult to find species in the overall count tally that might have been missed on Count Day.

Anyone can participate on the Christmas Bird Count, from total novice to expert birder. Those unable to access the outdoors can count birds in their yards or at their feeders and submit the data to Marcy Hafner, the CBC coordinator. Hafner will also assign counters to certain sections based upon coverage. If you're new to birdwatching, this is an excellent time to venture forth with more experienced birders to learn about birds in the Moab area.

Moab's count circle, centered near Coffee Pot Rock in the Sand Flats area encompasses Moab and Spanish valleys, Castle Valley, the River Road, the southern edge of Arches National Park, and the Sand Flats area. Diverse habitats



include the river and lakes, streamside vegetation, canyons, pinyon-juniper woodlands, urban and agricultural areas, and a little bit of higher elevation habitats with ponderosa pine.

Last year, there were 78 species of birds observed. Numerous waterfowl such as Canada geese, mallards, American wigeons, and wood ducks were recorded along with many species of raptors including golden and bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, and a single merlin. Most species observed were songbirds such as American robins, mountain bluebirds, white-crowned sparrows, house finches, and pygmy nuthatches.



### A NATURAL HISTORY WRITER.

Former Moabite, now based in the Pacific Northwest, Damian Fagan is a freelance natural history writer and nature photographer who focuses on the flora and fauna of the American Southwest and the Pacific Northwest. Of course, this gives him a good excuse to go hiking.



Rarities show up each season, as well, and these unexpected birds are always a treat. These include white-winged doves which seem to be expanding their range from the Sonoran Desert northward and American tree sparrows, a northern species that sometimes ranges south to Utah in winter.

Owls are under-represented on the count unless someone or a group goes owling in the pre-dawn hours or later in the day. Though great horned owls, pygmy owls, and western screech owls are observed, their numbers are low. Spending some time hooting and listening for owls in the late evening quiet is a fun way to find these nocturnal species.

Participants spend as much time as they can out birding, so again, if you're new to the count make sure you're prepared for changing weather conditions. There are walking and driving routes, mostly combinations of the two, and feeder watchers also contribute a great amount of information, as well.

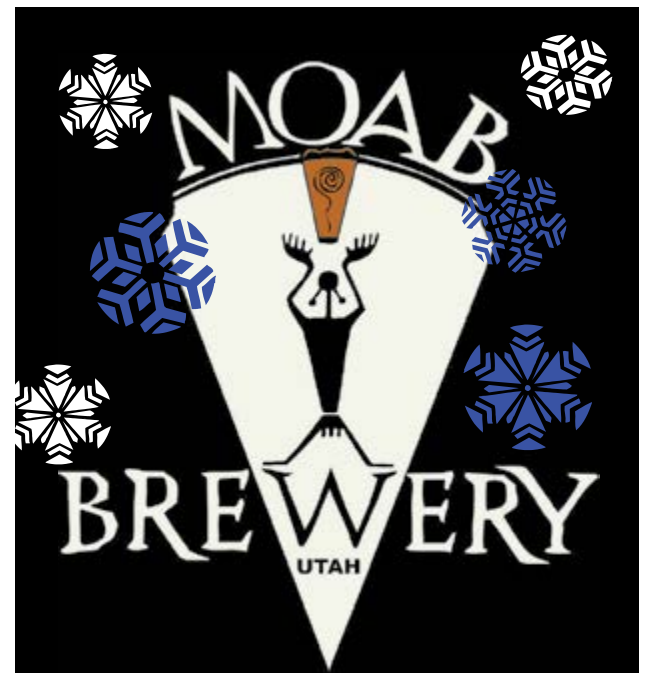
So, dig out those bird books and binoculars and do some warm up birding prior to Count Day. Contact Marcy Hafner at [marcymoab@gmail.com](mailto:marcymoab@gmail.com) to get assigned to a section or group.

Happy Holidays and Good Birding!



### Article Archive

To find previous Moab Happenings articles go to [moabhappenings.com](http://moabhappenings.com) and click on the Article Archive. It will take you to previous copies of complete Moab Happenings as well as previous articles by topic.



# WINTER SPECIALS

DECEMBER - FEBRUARY



MONDAY & WEDNESDAY

# 50¢ WINGS

TAVERN ONLY  
AVAILABLE ALL DAY

THURSDAY



# \$6

# BURGERS

AVAILABLE ALL DAY

# EVERY DAY

# \$4

# PINTS

AVAILABLE ALL DAY

# 686 S MAIN ST