

# SEA ISLANDS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2024-2025

The 14<sup>th</sup> Sea Islands Christmas Bird Count occurred on 3 January 2025. The weather for the count was pretty good. Temperatures started out on the chilly side (31° F) in the morning but warmed up to 58°F in the afternoon. The skies were mostly clear, and the winds were calm in the morning but increased throughout the day to about 15 mph.

After a down year last year, participation was back up to about average this year with 66 total participants. All sections within the count circle were covered although there were a couple of sections where we were spread kind of thin. We had 20 participants in 10 parties on Kiawah Island, 13 participants in 5 parties on Seabrook Island, 10 participants in 6 parties on John's Island, 7 participants in 3 parties on Wadmalaw Island, and 3 participants in 1 party on Deveau Bank. In addition to field parties, we had several feeder watchers too. There was 1 participant at 1 location on Kiawah, 7 participants at 7 locations on Seabrook, 1 participant at 1 location on John's Island, and none on Wadmalaw Island.

The Sea Islands Christmas Bird Count team recorded 25,677 individual birds and 161 different species. Overall bird numbers were about average, however that number can vary wildly from year to year. The east end of Kiawah had large roosting flocks of shorebirds and seabirds including more than 2,600 Semipalmated Plovers, 3,200 Dunlins, and 800 Black Skimmers. Species diversity has been fairly consistent over the years ranging between 154-159 in most years. This year, we had the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest total species in the history of the count with 161. Our highest was 162 in 2023. Compared to the average, we spent more time and travelled further during this year's count. Since 2012, we have recorded 362,117 individuals of 196 different species.

YEAR	# PARTICIPANTS	PARTY FIELD HOURS	FEEDER HOURS	PARTY MILES	# INDIVIDUALS	# SPECIES
2025	66	158.1	21.1	310.0	25,677	161
2024	56	137.7	31.2	270.7	26,729	153
2023	68	161.3	37.5	314	22,919	162
2022	60	147.9	43	288.3	18,908	158
2021	68	160.6	40.2	312.7	44,026	157
2020	70	127.9	40.4	304.7	23,127	156
2019	74	116.3	39.4	274.2	16,571	155
2018*	35	37.75	27.9	84.5	17,157	144
2017	73	139	13.6	324.1	38,630	158
2016	55	143.5	0	384.3	21,528	158
2015	45	156.1	0	363.3	41,096	159
2014	51	121	0	335.1	24,067	154
2013	47	106.8	0	321	22,652	146
2012**	23	27	0	73	19,029	132

\*Snowmageddon

\*\*unofficial - practice run

Two new species were added to the count this year: Sandwich Tern and Cave Swallow.

Some species highlights this year include King Rail, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Brown Creeper, Purple Finch, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Ovenbird.

We got most of the expected species but missed a few that are more regular: Gadwall, Surf Scoter, and Field Sparrow.

Species that exhibited record high numbers were many and include Hooded Merganser, Black-bellied Plover, Black Skimmer, America White Pelican, Great Egret (thanks to the Kiawah nighttime roost), Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Black-and-White Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler and Pine Warbler.

Only two species (Wood Duck and Wild Turkey) had record low numbers.

I would like to thank all the participants and volunteers for continuing to make this event a success. Not only is the bird count fun and educational for participants, but it also contributes valuable scientific data to aid in bird conservation across the country.

The date for next year's count looks like it might be either the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of January. I usually try to avoid weekends, the day after New Year's, and the last day of the count period (January 5<sup>th</sup>) but that includes all of the possible days after January 1 next year. Because of all the private lands that we cover, we must avoid deer season which goes through January 1<sup>st</sup> each year.