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NEWS RELEASE

Dakota Prairie Grasslands

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Shadehill Christmas Bird Count yields over 13,000 birds

The Shadehill Christmas Bird Count was held Wednesday, December 16. Eleven birders from Hettinger and Bismarck, North Dakota, and Lemmon, South Dakota, participated. A total of 13,386 individual birds of 40 different species were found. Approximately 84 percent of the total birds recorded were Canada geese and mallards huddled around the single patch of open water available on Shadehill Reservoir.

Christmas Bird Counts are held throughout North America each holiday season. During these one-day counts, birders attempt to record as many individual birds and bird species as possible within a 15-mile diameter circle from a designated location. The Shadehill count was centered on the intersection of South Dakota Highway 73 and Perkins County Road 2. The circle encompassed Shadehill Reservoir and portions of the Grand River National Grassland.

Christmas Bird Counts are often considered the social highlight of the year for the birding community, as they are typically followed by a potluck dinner at which participants recount their day's adventures. The count tradition dates to 1900 when a total of 25 "CBCs" were held. Last year, a total of 2,124 CBCs were held world-wide, including one in Antarctica. Scientists use the data collected during CBCs to monitor changes in winter bird populations. CBCs now constitute the world's largest and longest-running wildlife monitoring program.

Highlights of the Shadehill CBC included a wood duck, a Cooper's hawk, and a spotted towhee, all of which are very unusual during the winter season. New high counts were provided by the sighting of 32 rusty blackbirds and 131 American tree sparrows.

For more information on Christmas Bird Counts, or anyone wishing to participate in next year's event, should contact Dan Svingen, Dakota Prairie Grasslands Biologist, US Forest Service, Bismarck, at (701) 250-4443.

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