CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT · ONE-PAGE GUIDE

Photo prep for count day

127th count: December 14, 2026 to January 5, 2027. Each count circle holds its count on one day in that window.

1. Before you go

- **Set your camera's clock** (date, time and time zone), and turn on location if your camera or phone can record it. The timestamp becomes part of your record.
- **Ask your compiler** which species they want documented. Regional editors often say in advance.

2. When you find an unusual bird

- **Shoot several frames,** from different angles if you can, aiming for the features that separate it from its look-alikes. A plain shot that shows them beats a lovely one that doesn't.
- **Don't rely on a photo of the camera's screen.** eBird warns these "lack important metadata such as date and time". Fine for a quick alert; send the real file later.

3. Note what the photo can't show

The same day, in your own words: calls, behavior, size, distance, light, how long you watched it and who else saw it, plus which similar species you considered and how you ruled them out.

> "The best rule is that if it's a 'good bird' or not a winter regular, it should include details. Lack of a report could result in the species being omitted or tagged with the comment ND (no details)!"

Audubon, CBC Compiler's Manual (November 2025)

Cropping many photos after the count

Count day can leave you with hundreds of frames to crop by hand. BirdFrame, a Mac app, finds the birds in a whole folder or Apple Photos album and crops each one in one go, from the full-size original, with nothing downscaled or generated. Exported crops keep each photo's date and location. Free for up to 50 photos per run; macOS 15 or later.

4. Crop it for documentation



Left: the whole frame, where the bird is a speck. Right: a Balanced crop from the full-size original, with the log and grass kept for scale.

- **Make the bird large, but leave room:** eBird asks for "plenty of 'canvas' around the edge of the bird".
- **Crop, don't change the bird:** no heavy sharpening, extra saturation or "enhance" tools; never remove a branch or add anything.
- **Crop the original, not a copy,** and keep the original with its date, time and place. A screenshot can't be enlarged later.

5. Hand it over

This season, party leaders and compilers enter the count in Audubon's new online data form. For a species that's rare for your circle, it asks for a description of how the bird was identified, including diagnostic markings and sounds, and for any photos, and sends them straight to the compiler and regional editor. So give your party leader or compiler:

- the species, how many, and the name of your count
- the date, time and exact place
- who saw it, and your name and contact details
- your notes, written the same day
- the cropped photo **and** the original (JPEGs unless they ask for RAW)

Some unusual birds won't be flagged. Your compiler or regional editor may still ask for details and photos, and Audubon's printable Rare Bird Form is there when it's needed. The regional editor decides whether a record is accepted.

Free to share and reprint in club newsletters.

BirdFrame isn't affiliated with the National Audubon Society or the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The full guide, with sources:
getbirdframe.com/christmas-bird-count-photos/