

(S.D.)-Join the World-Wide Great Backyard Bird Count This Weekend

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 02/15/2013 09:41 AM

(RAPID CITY)-It's time once again for the annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), which is taking place nationwide, February 15th-18th.

The 16th annual, four-day event is free and open to bird watchers of all ages and skill levels. For the first time, birders worldwide with Internet access are getting ready to tally millions of birds in the annual count coordinated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon, and Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada.

Global participation will be made possible thanks to "eBird", a real-time online checklist program that the Cornell Lab and Audubon are integrating into the GBBC this year. Anyone visiting the GBBC website will be able to see bird observations from around the world and contribute their own tallies.

Wildlife Biologist Patrice Lynch with the Black Hills National Forest is hoping to help spread the word about the Bird Count and other birding opportunities in the Black Hills area specifically. "There are many opportunities to enjoy and learn about birds through local birding groups, state ornithological societies, and national bird organizations throughout the year," she says. "The Great Backyard Bird Count is just one of several winter birding events that helps collect valuable scientific information at both the local and global scale."

Participating is easy. Participants simply watch birds at any location for at least 15 minutes, tally the numbers of each species they see, and report their tallies. To learn more about how to join the count, get bird ID tips, plus downloadable instructions, web buttons, and flyers, visit www.BirdCount.org. The count also includes a photo contest and a prize drawing for participants who enter at least one bird checklist online. Portions of the GBBC site are also now available in Spanish at www.ContandoAves.org.

Participants will be able to view what others are seeing on interactive maps and contribute their tallies for ongoing bird research and conservation efforts. Participants will also be able to upload their counts from the field using the eBird BirdLog app for Apple or Android smartphones. To celebrate the new global reach of the count, developers of the eBird BirdLog app are offering regional versions of the app for a nominal fee through February 18th. The internet results will be updated hourly in the form of animated maps and colorful graphs, so participants will be able to see right away how their observations fit into the world-wide snapshot. In addition, the website provides bird check lists by region.

Lynch says this event is a great way to learn about birds in the Black Hills National Forest and in the surrounding area. For questions or assistance in participating in this event, contact Patrice Lynch at 605-343-1567 or Brad Phillips at 605-673-4853. For more information on the Black Hills National Forest, visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/blackhills>.