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Outdoor notes

Crosby-area bird count set for Dec. 15

The Audubon Society asks bird lovers in Brainerd, Crosby and Aitkin to join birders across the western hemisphere in a winter-time tradition: the annual Christmas Bird Count. This year's count is scheduled for Dec. 15.

In addition to being a lot of fun, the CBC provides scientific information on the winter distributions of birds. The CBC monitors the status of resident and migratory birds and the data is crucial to the government's natural history monitoring database.

In its 102nd year, CBC is larger than ever. "It's the longest running volunteer-based bird census, spanning three human generations,"



said Geoff LeBaron, CBC director. "It's evolved into a powerful and important tool, one probably inconceivable to any of the 27 participants on the first Christmas Bird County. Accumulated data from the CBC is important for monitoring the status of early winter bird populations as well as the overall health of the environment."

This year more than 50,000 volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, West Indies and Pacific islands will count and record every bird and bird species seen during a 24-hour calendar day. More than 1,800 individual circles will be covered during a two-and-a-half week period. Each group has a designated circle 15 miles in diameter -- about 177 square miles -- where they try to census as much ground as possible within a day.

For more information or directions, call Jo Blanich at (218) 546-5939.

Kentucky hunter shows off enormous deer, discovers it's an elk

JACKSON, Ky. (AP) -- Randolph Scott Stidham was so proud of shooting an enormous deer he drove it around town in the back of his pickup to show it off to friends.

They broke the bad news: He actually had shot one of 1,300 protected elk that wildlife officials have been trying to restore to the state's Appalachian mountains.

Now Stidham, 38, faces more than \$8,000 in fines and up to a year in jail.

"Anyone who mistakenly shoots an elk is an idiot," said Roy Grimes, deputy state fish and wildlife commissioner. "If a person cannot tell the difference between an elk and a deer, they should get rid of their firearms."

Elk weigh as much as 800 pounds; the antlers alone can weigh 50 pounds and extend 6 feet. Deer are about a quarter of the size.

Jessica Johnston, a 10th-grade student at Pillager High School, got her first bow-and-arrow deer kill last week. The buck was 30 yards away when she shot it. Jessica, who doesn't like treestands, shot the buck from a ground blind. Last year she shot her first deer with a gun. She said she probably will go back to gun hunting next year. "It's a lot easier," she said. "You just stick in the shells and you don't have to worry."
(Dispatch Photo by Vince Meyer)

"It's like comparing a tractor-trailer to a pickup truck," said Conservation Officer Jamon Halvaksz.

Stidham pleaded innocent this week to charges of possessing an elk. He and his attorney had no comment.

Prosecutor Hershel Branson said Stidham turned himself in as soon as he realized the error. "Obviously, he's guilty of it, but you have to look at intent," Branson said.

Fall walleye stocking a success

The DNR says it had a banner year for walleye fingerling stocking.

"We stocked about 4.3 million fingerlings totaling 158,000 pounds," said Roy Johannes, who coordinates the statewide walleye stocking program. "That's the most fingerlings we've stocked since 1989."

Most of the fingerlings were harvested by the DNR from more than 300 natural rearing ponds around Minnesota. About 4,100 pounds were purchased from a private fish hatchery. More than 400 state lakes received fingerlings this fall.

The 158,000 pounds of fingerlings stocked this fall exceeded this year's production goal by 28,000 pounds. The extra fish were used to increase stocking quotas on some lakes, including some that had not received full quotas in 1999 and 2000.

Saturn, Jupiter shine bright in evening

Washington Post

Mars remains visible during the early evening in December, but it will get little attention once Saturn and Jupiter rise.

Mars appears in the southwest sky after sunset. Although it does not shine very brightly now, it can be seen easily among the dim stars of the constellation Aquarius. A crescent moon will appear nearby on the nights of Dec. 19 and 20.

Saturn rises at sunset and will be visible all night long, setting only as the sun comes up in the morning. Saturn shines much brighter than Mars and is

brighter now than it has been for nearly 30 years. The ringed planet is in the constellation Taurus, the bull, near the red star Aldebaran.

The nearly full moon will appear very near Saturn the night of Dec. 27 and, early on the morning of Dec. 28, the planet will actually slip behind the moon. This will be the third such event for Saturn since September. Several more such occultations will occur next year.

As bright as Saturn appears now, Jupiter is even brighter. The largest planet in the solar system rises about an hour after Saturn and appears in the constellation Gemini, the twins.

After appearing near Saturn Dec. 27, the moon will be between Saturn and Jupiter Dec. 28 and near Jupiter the nights of Dec. 29 and 30.

The Geminid meteor shower is expected to peak the nights of Dec. 12 and 13. From dark skies, as many as one meteor per minute may be visible between about 10 p.m. EST and dawn.

On Dec. 14, a solar eclipse will be visible from most of the United States.

The winter solstice occurs at 2:22 p.m. EST on Dec. 21. At this time, the Earth reaches the point in its orbit at which the sun is directly overhead as far south as it ever gets. After this, the sun begins moving north again, bringing its warming energy even as we begin the coldest period of our year.

Full moon occurs the night of Dec. 29.

Nominees sought for annual deer hunting ethics award

Nominees are being sought for an award that honors a deer hunter for ethical behavior. The Minnesota Deer Hunter Ethics Award, sponsored by the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, Turn in Poachers and the DNR, will honor a hunter who has exhibited conduct that serves as an example of admirable hunting practices. The award will be presented at the 2002 MDHA Habitat Banquet on April 27 in Blue Earth.

Anyone may nominate a hunter by writing a letter explaining the actions of the nominee and why that person is worthy of recognition. Youths and adults are eligible but nominees must be Minnesota residents. The incidents for which hunters are nominated must have occurred during any of the 2001 Minnesota deer hunting seasons (archery, firearm or muzzleloader).

The MDHA will accept nominations until Feb. 15, 2002. Nomination letters should be sent to Mark Johnson, MDHA, 460 Peterson Road, Grand Rapids, MN 55744-8413.

China misreporting masks decline in fish catches

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Catches from the world's oceans are severely declining but the trend has been masked by China's practice of increasingly overreporting the amount of fish it lands each year, researchers say.

A team of scientists based at the University of British Columbia at Vancouver found that global catches, which were thought to be increasing during the 1990s by 700 million pounds of fish per year, actually have been decreasing by nearly 800 million pounds of fish annually.

Just one entity, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, compiles global fisheries statistics, but it relies on voluntary reporting of catches from countries to estimate the amount of fish the oceans hold.

The new studies being reported Thursday in the journal *Nature* call into question the veracity of FAO figures and its reporting system.

"FAO must generally rely on the statistics provided by member countries, even if it is doubtful that these correspond to reality," authors Reg Watson and Daniel Pauly said.

Moreover, by subtracting just one fish from the equation, the abundant Peruvian anchoveta, which is used only for fish meal and whose population fluctuates due to El Nino, an even more striking decrease was apparent: 1.5 billion pounds a year less seafood available for human consumption.

"Misreporting by countries with large fisheries, combined with the large and widely fluctuating catch of species such as the Peruvian anchoveta, can cause globally spurious trends," Watson and Pauly said.

Since 1988, when the world's seafood supply peaked at 34 pounds a person each year, the combined effects of overfishing and increasing human populations have reduced the amount of fish and shellfish available on Earth to only about 25 pounds a person per year now, according to the findings.

The trend is projected to continue rapidly downward to less than 17 pounds a

person each year by 2020.

The studies' authors also note that the practice of aquaculture, or fish farming, cannot make up the difference since that system relies on the use of fish meal which comes from a third of all fish landed globally.

The Chinese government relies on local officials to provide catch figures.

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