BIRD COUNT

Camp Salmen has to fortune of being included by the local chapter of the National Audubon Society in an ongoing annual Christmastime Bird Count. They send a team to the park during off hours in the Holiday Season to walk around unobtrusively and carefully watch, listen and take notes of the birdlife that stays here through the winter. This information is compiled in a nation-wide database sponsored by the outfit inspired by the magnificent bird drawings done by John James Audubon here in Louisiana and elsewhere in the 1820-40s.

This group surveys a fifteen-mile diameter “Count Circle” centered on Slidell and includes both city neighborhoods and parts of the wetland wilderness of the Pearl River basin and Big Branch National Wildlife Reserve on St. Tammany Parish’s lake coast. It’s one a several circles dotting the Florida Parishes and is part of a North American network of hundreds of similar areas. They have been doing this here since 1998. You can learn more about Audubon and this program at [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).

For those of us who’ve tried, it takes a special skill set and a lot of patience to positively identify a creature who looks a lot like a lot of other birds and may only be identifiable by subtle marks, may be camouflaged, who may or may not be making any identifying noise, might be constantly flitting about and won’t conveniently sit still among the visual clutter of leaves, branches and twigs in the woods. Binoculars are both a blessing and a curse because, while they may zoom in to make for better identification, if you don’t have your target centered in narrow field of view in the lens and the nervous little beasts doesn’t stay there, you have to start all over again by dropping your binoculars to use your un-aided, wide-vision to get an idea where the bird is in the confusion and then hope you’ve aimed the glass right for another try.

So what were the birds spotted this year at Ole Camp Swampy? There were a lot of “regulars” like Cardinals, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds and Blue Jays; some completely unknown to this writer but comparatively numerous and funny-sounding like Yellow-rumped Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and the legendary Tufted Titmouse and crowd-pleasers that are sighted less often at Camp Salmen but whose presence is completely understandable such as the Brown Pelican, the Bald Eagle and the sneaky Brown Creeper. A list of this year’s official bird count can be seen at friendsofcampsalmen.org.