CITIZEN SCIENTISTS NEEDED FOR 2017 GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

(Atlanta, Ga.) February 8, 2017 – Atlanta Audubon Society is seeking citizen scientists to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count **February 17-20, 2017**. On these four days, birdwatchers from across the globe will be counting birds and sharing the information with a community of other bird watchers in near real-time. The **Great Backyard Bird Count** collects and displays data in order to create a "snapshot" of the distribution and abundance of birds worldwide in the month of February. This snapshot helps scientists get a 'big picture' glimpse of current trends in bird populations.

Created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society in 1988, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first participation-based project to collect and display data from birdwatchers across the globe. Last year, more than 160,000 birdwatchers from more than 130 countries participated in the count and together counted 5,689 different species of birds. In 2016, Georgians submitted 4,295 checklists and counted 208 different species of birds.

Information gathered during this four-day event is used by scientists in conjunction with data from other citizen science projects, including the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to provide a 'big picture' look into what is happening to bird populations. This data helps scientists find answers to questions such as:

- How weather and climate change influence bird populations
- Where species are from year to year, and what we can learn from these patterns, how the timing of birds' migrations compare with years' past
- How bird diseases such as West Nile virus are affecting birds in different regions
- And what differences exist in bird diversity in cities versus suburban, rural and natural areas

All types of bird enthusiasts can participate, from avid birders who prefer to look for birds in the fields and forests around metro-Atlanta to people who prefer to count birds at their backyard feeders from the comfort of their own homes. Participants must complete the following steps:

1. **Register for the count** on the Great Backyard Bird Count website at http://gbbc.birdcount.org/ . Those who have participated in past counts, or those who are already registered with eBird or another Cornell Lab citizen-science project can use their existing login information. Those who have never participated will need to create a new account. There is no charge to participate.

2. **Count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the Great Backyard Bird Count.** Count anywhere you wish, for as long as you wish. Keep track of the numbers and species of birds you see as well as how long you watched. Make your best estimate for how many birds you saw of each species. Estimates are still valuable, so give it your best guess even if you are not sure! Collect your data in separate checklists for each day, for each new location, or for the same location if you counted at a different time of day.

3. **Enter your results on the Great Backyard Bird Count website by clicking "Submit Observations" on the home page.** You can also submit information by downloading the free eBird Mobile app to enter data on a mobile device. If you already participate in the eBird citizen-science project, please use eBird to submit your sightings during the Great Backyard Bird Count. Your checklists will count toward the Great Backyard Bird Count. Bird list submissions for the GBBC can begin at **midnight local time** on the first day of the count (2/17/17), from anywhere in the world.

For more information, please visit the Great Backyard Bird Count webpage at http://gbbc.birdcount.org/.

The mission of the Atlanta Audubon Society is to protect Georgia's birds and their habitats through conservation, education and advocacy.

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