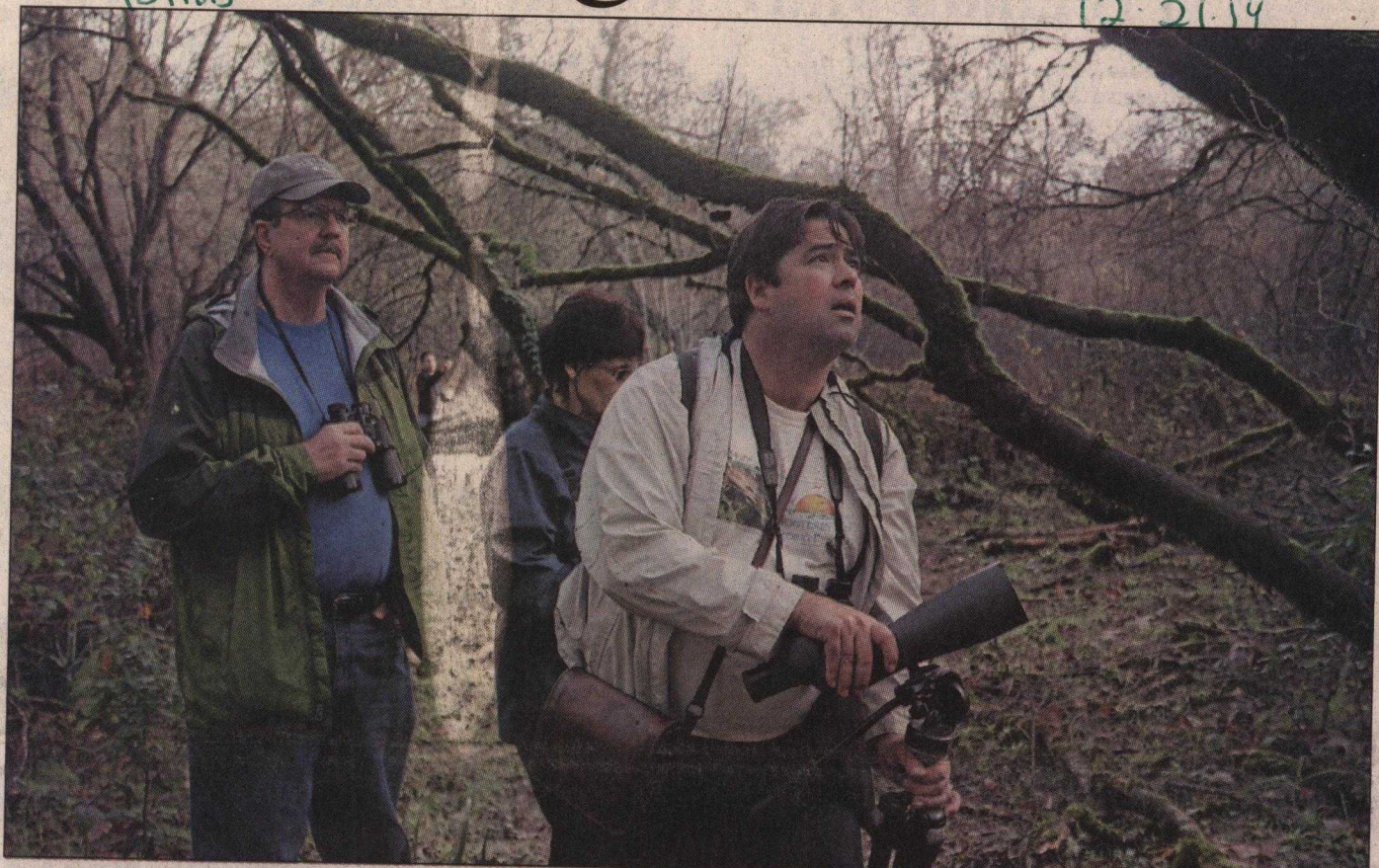


# Watching the birdies

Birds

12-21-14



Eric Feuss, right, stops to watch for birds along a trail in Henry Coe State Park during the 58th annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday. PHOTOS BY JON WEIAND — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

## Christmas Bird Count draws a flock of volunteers

By Calvin Men

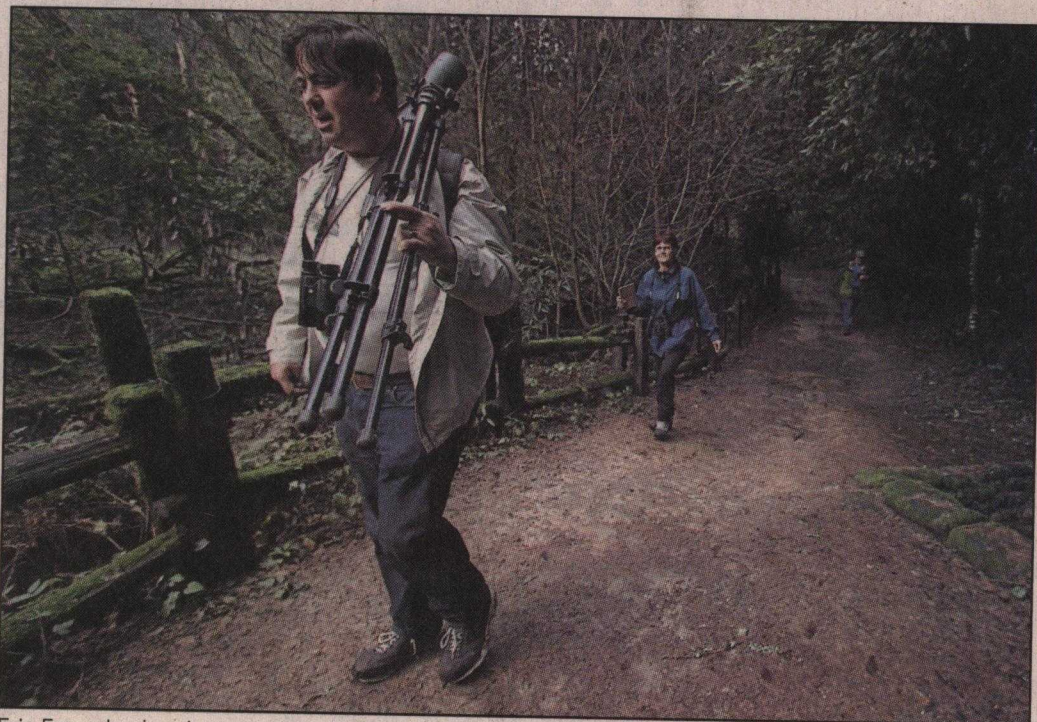
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**FELTON** » At 3 a.m. Saturday, when most Santa Cruz County residents were still in bed, Eric Feuss braved the drizzle at Bonny Doon Preserve to count birds.

Feuss was one of about 80 volunteers who came out for the 58th annual Christmas Bird Count in Santa Cruz County.

Volunteers walked through fields, hiked along trails or perched on beaches to count birds in the region for the National Audubon Society, which started the annual count on a national level 115 years ago.

Feuss, who organized the count in the county, said the count roughly shows what populations are up and down. The region Feuss coordinates the bird count in is comprised of 14 sec-



Eric Feuss leads volunteers Julia Jackson and Dave Turner of Walnut Creek through Henry Cowell State Park during the 58th Annual Christmas Bird Count in Santa Cruz County on Saturday.

tions, each with a set group of volunteers designated to count birds. The numbers are fed to the Audubon Society and are

used for annual reports, including a climate change report released this year that used numbers from years past.

The volunteers that attend vary from seasoned people who participated for years to

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# Bird

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people such as Julia Jackson, 70, and her husband Dave Turner, 68. The couple started bird watching — birding to enthusiasts of the hobby — in August and considered themselves novices but wanted to participate nonetheless.

"The most difficult part is identifying the bird," said Jackson. "Sometimes you can identify the bird by the sound, by the flight pattern or visually if you have a sighting of the bird."

The challenges lie in the fact that hundreds of birds frequent the region and neither Jackson nor Turner are proficient at quickly spotting and identifying. Jackson, after four hours of counting, said the most efficient way was simply to listen for bird calls.

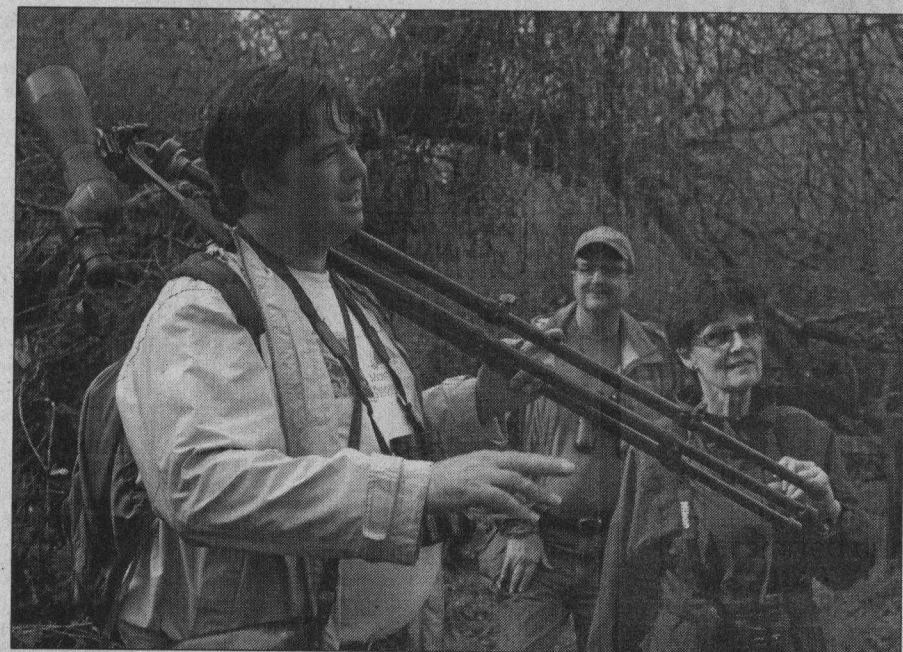
"I'm a novice and I'm better at note taking," Jackson sheepishly said.

But Feuss accompanied the duo for the better part of the day and quickly assured Jackson that doing it alone was no easy task. He said he'll often to go write on the ledger after counting a bird and then hear another one coming.

"There is no good way to count the birds because you never know what's coming at you and when," he said.

He's ready nonetheless. Armed with a spotting scope mounted on a tripod, binoculars around his neck and a bird guide stuffed into a pouch on his belt, Feuss knows how to find a bird.

Walking in Henry Cow-



JON WEIAND — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Eric Feuss, left, Julie Jackson, right, and Dave Turner, background, discuss the day's events in Henry Cowell State Park during the 58th Annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday.

ell Redwoods State Park on Saturday, the trio paused often to listen for the cries of passing birds. Near the San Lorenzo River, Feuss sets down his gear and looks around slowly, listening for any sign of life.

A small figure darted between tree branches before flying off. A ruby-crowned Kinglet, Fuess said, adding that he could hear it.

Fuess' skill impressed Turner and Jackson.

"He is amazing. He can hear a bird before he sees them," Turner said. "That's someone with a lot of expertise."

Feuss' passion started when his mom brought him to Audubon Society meetings as a kid.

"My mom dragged me to all these meetings and I was so reluctant to go," said Fuess, smiling at the memory. "But eventually, I was the one leading the groups."

He shared the knowledge with the couple throughout their trek, explaining each bird they spot in detail and how he knows.

"If you say I see a little brown bird, he'll say, it's actually such and such bird," Turner said. "You can learn so much."