

# Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2004-05



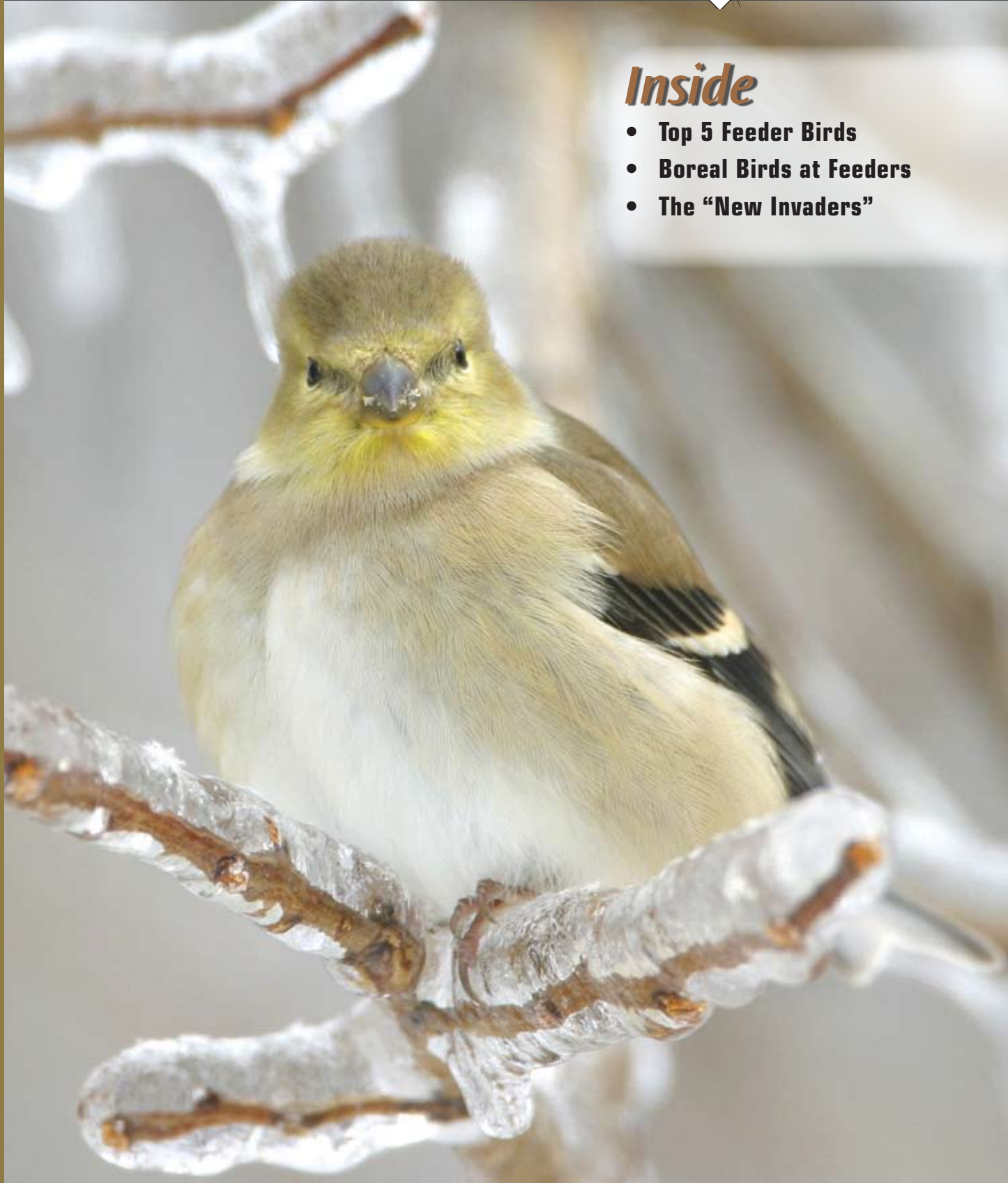
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BIRD STUDIES  
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX CANADA

## *Inside*

- Top 5 Feeder Birds
- Boreal Birds at Feeders
- The “New Invaders”



**W**elcome to the first annual issue of *Winter Bird Highlights*! This publication is designed to feature the contributions of citizen scientists from across North America who make Project FeederWatch a reality. Since 1987, nearly 36,000 people have submitted counts of the birds at their feeders, contributing more than 1 million checklists and helping us learn much about the distribution and abundance of birds in winter.

In 2004–05, 14,270 volunteer citizen scientists supported the project, submitting 101,959 checklists. Turn to the regional summaries, starting on page 6, to see if your observations were similar to those of FeederWatchers in your area.

In addition to their count data, hundreds of participants submitted more than 2,000 photos last winter. In fact, FeederWatchers contributed all of the photos used in this publication. We hope that you enjoy the first edition of *Winter Bird Highlights*, and we welcome your feedback and ideas for next year's issue.



*Blue Jay in Kanata, Ontario, by Elena Petrcich. Cover photo of American Goldfinch in Liberty, Missouri, by Linda Williams.*

*Focus on Citizen Science* is a publication series dedicated to highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This first issue, *Winter Bird Highlights 2005*, is brought to you by Project FeederWatch, a joint research and education project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bird Studies Canada, Audubon, and Nature Canada.

Project FeederWatch is made possible by the efforts and support of thousands of citizen scientists in the United States and Canada.

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**David Bonter**

Project Leader, USA

**Janis Dickinson**

Director of Citizen Science, USA

**Wesley Hochachka**

Research Associate, USA

**Anne Marie Johnson**

Project Assistant, USA

**Rosie Kirton**

Project Support, Canada

**Denis Lepage**

Senior Scientist, Canada

**Beth Wells**

Project Assistant, Canada

**Megan Whitman**

Project Assistant, USA

**Becky Whittam**

Project Leader, Canada

### ***Join Project FeederWatch!***

Anyone in the United States and Canada with an interest in birds and a feeder to watch is welcome to join. Help scientists monitor winter bird populations while you learn more about the birds in your neighborhood. To join, contact the FeederWatch office in your country.

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Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
159 Sapsucker Woods Road  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
1-800-254-BIRD (2473)  
feederwatch@cornell.edu  
www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

#### ***Canada***

Bird Studies Canada  
P.O. Box 160  
Port Rowan, ON N0E 1M0  
1-888-448-BIRD (2473)  
pfw@bsc-eoc.org  
www.bsc-eoc.org/national/pfw.html

### ***Focus on Citizen Science Staff***

**David Bonter, Becky Whittam,  
Miyoko Chu**  
Editors

**Caren Cooper, Wesley Hochachka,  
Kenneth V. Rosenberg**  
Technical Editors

**Diane Tessaglia-Hymes, Susan Spear**  
Graphic Designers

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# Rare Birds Visit Feeders

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON,  
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Each year a few lucky FeederWatch participants host rare birds—birds that are out of their typical winter range. Last winter's reports included many sightings of Varied Thrushes east of their normal winter range (located along the coast of Alaska and British Columbia, east to Idaho and south to California). One Varied Thrush found at the home of Beth Hoar in Hunter River, Prince Edward Island, was the first confirmed sighting of the species in that province!

Other rare bird highlights included birds wandering far from where they should have been at any time of year. A Black-throated Blue Warbler wintered in Oregon and was often seen feeding on nectar from a hummingbird feeder at the home of FeederWatcher Susan Sterne. Participants in Vermont and New Hampshire documented Yellow-throated Warblers, and a Yellow-headed Blackbird visited FeederWatcher Evelyn Nowoselski in Lake Cowichan, British Columbia.

## Western Tanagers in Florida

WESTERN Tanager BY PAUL RUTKOVSKY



For the second consecutive winter, Fran Rutkovsky of Tallahassee, Florida, hosted a Western Tanager at her feeders. Western Tanagers normally winter in southern Mexico and Central America. Breeding in the western half of North America, this species should be nowhere near Florida even in summer. Many species demonstrate site fidelity in winter as well as during the breeding season, and the bird visiting Fran's yard this season was likely the same bird seen in 2003–04. This year, however, Fran's tanager appears to have brought a friend as two tanagers were seen at once. The birds regularly visited Fran's feeders from early January to late April.



Orchard Oriole in Manteca, California, photo by Tiny Gehrke

## Orchard Oriole in California

Tiny Gehrke, a beginning birder and first time FeederWatch participant, discovered an Orchard Oriole in her backyard in Manteca, California, on February 5, 2005. Orchard Orioles normally winter from central Mexico to northwestern South America. An Orchard Oriole would be rare in California even in summer, since they breed in the eastern half of the United States. Tiny reported that birders came from all over northern California to see her oriole. She wrote, "I met a lot of nice people because of the oriole. It was a real nice experience, and we learned a lot from these respected birders."

## Do you have a rare bird at your feeders?

If you see a rare bird at your feeders, please be sure to report your sighting to FeederWatch, even if the bird is not seen on a scheduled count day. To confirm your sighting

- Note distinguishing field marks and draw a sketch.
- Take a picture! Photo documentation is required to distinguish between similar species.
- Invite local birders to visit and share in the fun!

FeederWatchers submitting data online can report a rare bird sighting on the Rare Bird Form located inside Data Entry. FeederWatchers contributing data on paper forms will find a special form for reporting rare birds inside the instruction booklet.

**More rare bird highlights:** All confirmed rare bird reports from recent seasons are listed in the Explore Data section of the FeederWatch web site: [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw)

# Feeder Birds of the North

Boreal specialists of Canada and Alaska

BY BECKY WHITTAM, BIRD STUDIES CANADA

**N**orth America's boreal forest, stretching from Alaska to Newfoundland and Labrador, is home to close to 30% of all landbirds in Canada and the United States combined. Most of these birds spend only a short breeding season in the boreal forest before moving south, where many are counted by FeederWatchers.

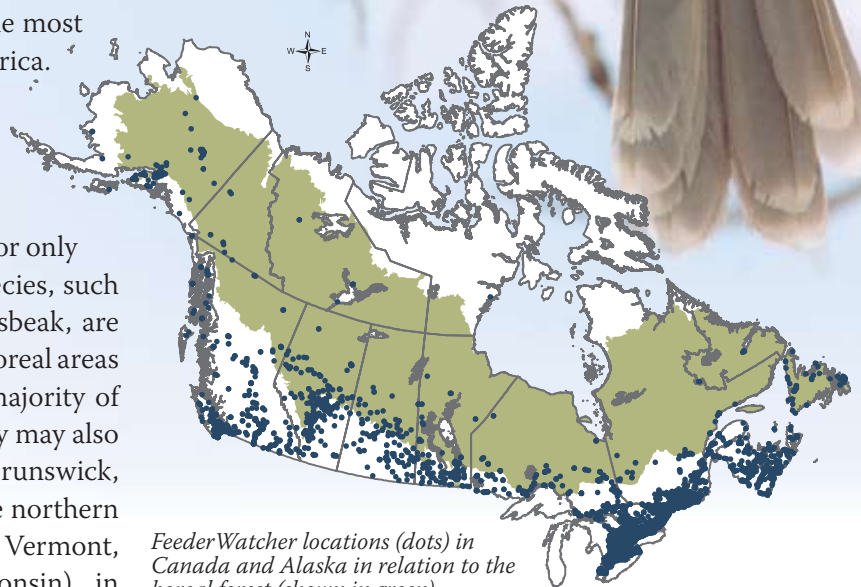
For example, the Dark-eyed Junco is the most abundant breeding bird in the boreal forest as well as the most common feeder bird across North America. FeederWatchers, therefore, can make a significant contribution to understanding the abundance and winter distribution of this species.

About 6% of boreal birds are nonmigratory or only move when food supplies are poor. These species, such as Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, and Pine Grosbeak, are often counted by FeederWatchers within the boreal areas of northern Canada and Alaska. While the majority of these birds' ranges are in the boreal forest, they may also reside year-round in Maritime Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island), some northern states (notably Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, northern New York, Minnesota, and Wisconsin), in western mountain ranges and, in the case of the Pine Grosbeak, coastal rain forests.

Resident birds of the boreal forest have special adaptations for dealing with cold and snow. Both Boreal Chickadee and Gray Jay cache their food; in fact, Boreal Chickadees have been observed caching 45 items per hour in August (including spruce seeds, insects, spiders, larvae). Gray Jays use their sticky saliva to glue pellets of food to twigs or tree trunks at heights above the normal depth of winter snow. Both Gray Jay and Boreal



*Gray Jay in Wilno, Ontario, by Brian Shulist*



*FeederWatch locations (dots) in Canada and Alaska in relation to the boreal forest (shown in green).*

Chickadee have a thick, insulating plumage, and reduce their body temperature at night to save energy.

The Pine Grosbeak leaves the boreal forest in years of low food supply, although it does not visit feeders in large numbers or as far south as many other finches; rather, it sticks to southern Canada and the northern United States where it prefers to feed on tree seeds. When it does come to feeders, it prefers black-oil and striped sunflower seeds. The biennial pattern of Pine Grosbeak

*Percentage of FeederWatch locations visited by three boreal bird species across Canadian regions and Alaska (averaged across years, 1989–2005).*

	Alaska	British Columbia	Prairie Canada	Ontario	Quebec	Atlantic Canada
<b>Boreal Chickadee</b>	57.9	3.9	14.6	5.3	6.8	9.7
<b>Gray Jay</b>	32.6	11.4	19.6	8.6	6.2	11.0
<b>Pine Grosbeak</b>	57.5	13.5	43.6	14.7	19.7	7.5






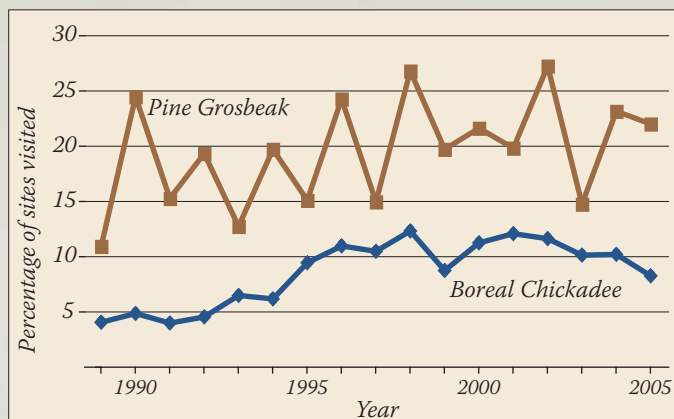
Red Crossbill and Pine Siskins in Whitbourne, Newfoundland, by Lester Rees

movements is clearly seen in a plot of percentage of feeders visited across Canada and Alaska (see graph).

Boreal Chickadees also show some tendencies to periodically leave the boreal forest for points south. However, these movements (called “irruptions”) may occur in different regions in different years and, unlike the movements of grosbeaks, the irruptions are not biennial but rather occur every three to five (or more) years.

Reports of Pine Grosbeaks and Boreal Chickadees have increased since the beginning of FeederWatch (see graph). Perhaps natural food supplies are declining, forcing these birds to come to feeders more often, or perhaps FeederWatchers are simply learning to cater to the tastes of these unique birds. For example, in the case of the Pine Grosbeak, the increase may be explained by a concurrent increase in plantings of native trees enjoyed by Pine Grosbeak, such as mountain ash and crab apple.

Only a minority of FeederWatchers are lucky enough to regularly host these boreal specialists at their feeders. Those who do should be proud of the contribution they are making toward understanding the distribution, movements, and feeding habits of these birds. 




Percentage of FeederWatchers in Canada and Alaska reporting Pine Grosbeak (brown line) and Boreal Chickadee (blue line), 1989–2005.

## Atlantic Canadian FeederWatchers asked to track endangered finch

One irruptive finch species that is counted only rarely by FeederWatchers, especially in the east, is the Red Crossbill. At least eight subspecies of Red Crossbills occur in North America, each with a different-sized bill adapted for opening the cones of particular conifers. While populations of Red Crossbills appear stable in the west, the Newfoundland subspecies (*Loxia curvirostra percna*) appears to be in decline. Possible explanations for the decline include the loss and fragmentation of mature coniferous forests due to forestry activities, changes in forest fire cycles, and outbreaks of insects and fungi that impact the bird’s preferred trees. Red squirrels may also pose a significant threat since their introduction in the 1960s. Squirrels may be outcompeting crossbills for conifer seeds, particularly in poor seed crop years when squirrels harvest nearly all of the cones produced. As a result of the recent population declines, this subspecies of crossbill is now listed as “Endangered” in Canada.

During years when conifer seeds are sparse, crossbills may irrupt into other regions and visit backyard bird feeders in search of food. Even during irruption years, however, the Red Crossbill is not a common bird in eastern Canada. For example, in 2002–03 when the largest irruption of Red Crossbills occurred since Project FeederWatch began, Red Crossbills visited only 5% of feeders in Atlantic Canada in groups averaging eight individuals. In most years, not a single FeederWatcher in Atlantic Canada records this species.

FeederWatchers in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island are asked to be on the lookout for Red Crossbills and to send any photos, videos, and sound recordings to the Canadian FeederWatch office. 



## Regional Round-up

A summary of trends in feeder observations during the winter of 2004–05



*Feeder scene in Oxford, Ohio, by Alice Kahn*

BY DAVID BONTER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

**T**he Project FeederWatch participants who submitted bird counts during the winter of 2004–05 provided a wealth of information about the status and trends of feeder-bird populations from across North America.

FeederWatch reports indicated an unusual movement of irruptive species, an unprecedented northward range expansion of Red-bellied Woodpeckers, continued northward movements of Carolina Wrens and Tufted Titmice, an unusually large number of Varied Thrushes leaving their typical western wintering areas for points east, and ongoing declines in the numbers of House Finches seen at feeders in much of North America. Evening Grosbeak and House Sparrow counts continued on their downward slide in most regions, while populations of many other common feeder birds appeared to remain stable or to increase.

### *Biennial irruptive cycle falls apart*

The irruptive species, including Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins, and Red-breasted Nuthatches, have followed predictable, biennial “boom-or-bust” cycles in recent decades. Every other year, these birds leave their preferred boreal habitats in search of food when supplies are short. Last winter was expected to be a poor year for seeing irruptives in much of North America following a large movement in 2003–04. In many regions, however, irruptives visited feeders in back-to-back winters, breaking the biennial cycle. Common Redpolls moved for the second consecutive winter into much of their

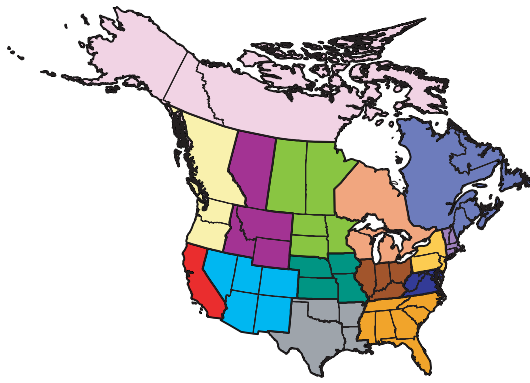
irruptive range, although the birds largely failed to reach New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, as they often do in typical irruptions. Pine Siskins moved into the center of the continent in larger numbers than in recent seasons and also had strong showings in the North Atlantic region, in the Southeast, and in California. Reports of Red-breasted Nuthatches were greater than expected in most regions as well.

### *Red-bellied Woodpeckers move north*

One particularly unusual event recorded by FeederWatchers last winter was the rapid range expansion of Red-bellied Woodpeckers into parts of New England and Atlantic Canada. For decades, the range of this woodpecker has been slowly creeping northward from its core range in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern states. More FeederWatchers along the northern edge of the red-bellied’s range host the species each year. However, the pace and extent of the range expansion last winter was impressive in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.

### *Wren and titmouse ranges continue to expand*

Other eastern species showing continued northward movements include the Carolina Wren and Tufted



**Project FeederWatch Regions**

- Alaska-Northern Canada
- Allegheny
- California
- East Central
- Great Lakes
- Mid-Atlantic
- Mid-Central
- New England
- North Atlantic
- North Central
- North Pacific
- Northern Rockies
- South Central
- Southeast
- Southwest

FeederWatch reports are divided into 15 regions with similar winter bird communities. How do your observations compare with those of FeederWatchers in your region?

Titmouse. Both species are becoming regular feeder visitors from the Great Lakes through New England, particularly at low-elevation sites. FeederWatch reports of Carolina Wrens have increased nearly everywhere throughout the species' range, which may reflect either an increase in population size in many regions (as indicated by the Breeding Bird Survey) or an increase in FeederWatchers providing suet, mealworms, and peanuts to attract the wrens.

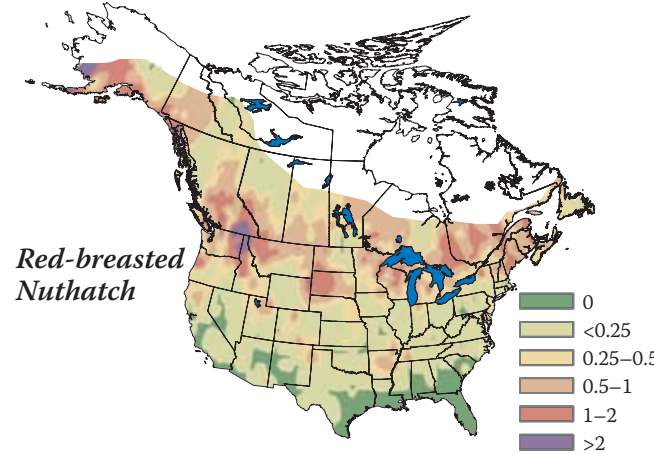
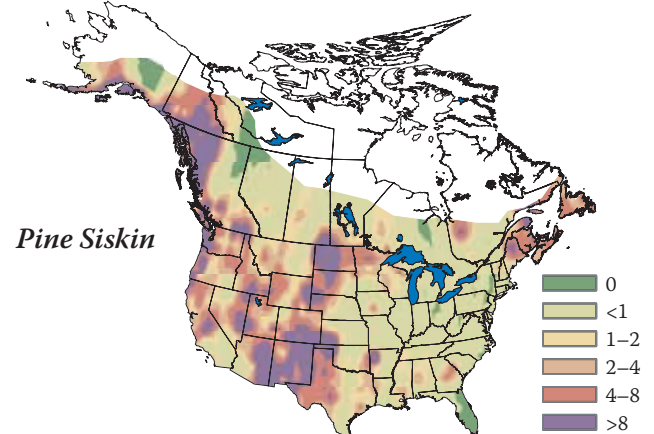
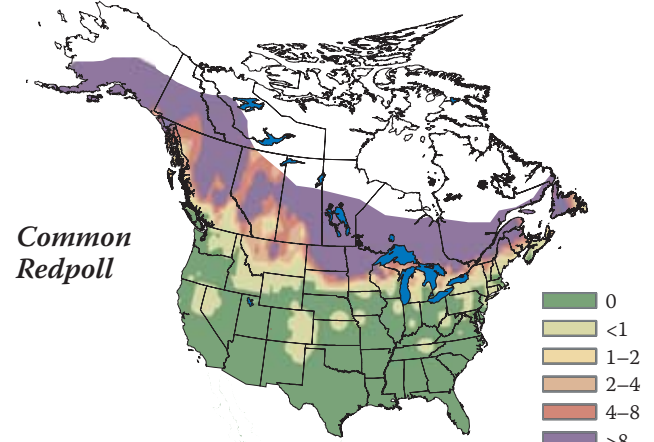
**Varied Thrushes wander east**

The dynamic winter distribution of Varied Thrushes was well documented in an analysis of FeederWatch data nearly a decade ago.\* In 2004–05, most Varied Thrushes wintered in coastal British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon, with the fewest reports from California since 1998. However, more vagrants were noted in central and eastern North America, with six confirmed reports from FeederWatchers.

**House Finches hang in there**

House Finches remained among the most common species seen at feeders across North America despite the continued decline in the average flock size reported in most regions. Flock sizes at feeders dropped to record or near-record lows in the North Pacific, Great Lakes, New England, Allegheny, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and East Central regions. However, in these regions and elsewhere, the percentage of sites reporting House Finches has remained stable. The eye disease affecting this species continues to impact local flock sizes without leading to the complete disappearance of the species in an area.

Did your observations match the trends in your region? Pages 9–13 provide quick summaries focusing on notable patterns from 15 regions in North America, including the “Top 5” species for each region, based on the proportion of feeders visited.



\*Wells, J. V., K. V. Rosenberg, D. L. Tessaglia, A. A. Dhondt. 1996. Population cycles in the Varied Thrush. Canadian Journal of Zoology 74: 2062–2069.

Average flock sizes of Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, and Red-breasted Nuthatch based on FeederWatch reports during the winter of 2004–05. Limited data from northern Canada and Alaska prevent mapping in the far north.





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## Alaska-Northern Canada: Irruptives dominate Top 5 list



Common Redpoll counts increased dramatically in 2004–05 over the previous season, vaulting this species into the top spot on the list of most common feeder birds in the region. Redpolls were reported at 92% of FeederWatch locations with the average flock exceeding 27 birds. The proportion of FeederWatchers reporting Pine Grosbeaks and Red-breasted Nuthatches also increased over the previous season, placing three irruptive species in the Alaska-Northern Canada Top 5. Other notable sightings from the region included White-winged Crossbill, which was reported from 10% of FeederWatch locations, making them one of the region's Top 25.

## North Pacific: Red-breasted Nuthatches approach record



As in Alaska and Northern Canada, irruptive species were common in the North Pacific region in 2004–05. Red-breasted Nuthatch reports approached an all-time high (68% of sites) and 76% of sites reported Pine Siskins. On the down side, the average flock size of House Finches in the North Pacific region dropped to an all-time low. Since the early 1990s, average flock sizes have declined from more than eight birds to fewer than five birds. Despite these declines, House Finches remained the #2 ranked feeder species in the region. Sightings of Purple Finch, a close relative of the House Finch, have steadily declined in the region over the history of FeederWatch. Only 28% of sites reported the species in 2004–05 compared with more than 50% of locations in the early 1990s. Because Purple Finches in the North Pacific region are a unique subspecies, these declines warrant further research.

## California: Finches abound!



Despite declines in some finch species north of California, finches were abundant at feeders within the state during the 2004–05 FeederWatch season. The House Finch remained the most common feeder bird in California, with reports remaining stable in this region despite declining counts in many other regions. Pine Siskin reports reached their third highest levels since the beginning of Project FeederWatch, bringing the species into the regional Top 10. American Goldfinch reports neared all-time highs (60% of sites), and Lesser Goldfinches were reported more often than in any previous season (68% of sites).

## Northern Rockies: Where are the Evening Grosbeaks?



American Robins were seen at a record high proportion of feeders (51%), while Evening Grosbeaks continued to decline. Evening Grosbeaks were reported from only 23% of sites in the region, compared with more than 60% of sites in the early 1990s. House Finches, while generally becoming less common elsewhere, were reported at a record high proportion of FeederWatch sites in the Northern Rockies in 2004–05. Common Redpoll numbers dropped, as expected, following near-record highs the previous season. However, redpoll reports did not fall far (recorded at 49% of sites compared with 60% of sites in 2003–04) and were comparable to the numbers reported during previous irruptions.

## Regional Top 5

### Alaska-Northern Canada

53 participants

- 1 Common Redpoll
- 2 Black-capped Chickadee
- 3 Pine Grosbeak
- 4 Red-breasted Nuthatch
- 5 Black-billed Magpie

### North Pacific

609 participants

- 1 Dark-eyed Junco
- 2 House Finch
- 3 Black-capped Chickadee
- 4 Northern Flicker
- 5 Pine Siskin

### California

396 participants

- 1 House Finch
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 3 Anna's Hummingbird
- 4 Western Scrub-Jay
- 5 Dark-eyed Junco

### Northern Rockies

229 participants

- 1 Black-capped Chickadee
- 2 Downy Woodpecker
- 3 Dark-eyed Junco
- 4 House Sparrow
- 5 Black-billed Magpie

Regional Top 25 lists and trend graphs for 95 species can be found in the Explore Data section of the FeederWatch web site.



Common Redpolls made unexpected appearances in many regions in 2005–06. Photo by Raymond Belhumeur of Saint-Hubert, Quebec.



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### **North Central: No off-year for irruptives**



The second consecutive major irruption of Common Redpolls was certainly the story of the winter in the North Central region. If the 17-year pattern held as predicted, fewer than 20% of sites in the region should have reported redpolls in 2004–05 following the irruption of 2003–04. Instead, more locations (72%) hosted redpolls last season than during the previous season (62%), taking the species to #7 on the list of most common feeder birds. Other irruptive species with greater than expected numbers were Red-breasted Nuthatch and Pine Siskin. The number of sites reporting American Crows reached an all-time high, in contrast with the pattern of declining counts in the east.

### **Mid-Central: Carolina Wrens on the increase**



Although plenty of changes were noted elsewhere in North America, the Top 10 species in the Mid-Central region remained the same in 2004–05 as in the previous season. Dark-eyed Juncos were again the most common species, present at nearly all of the 291 FeederWatch sites in the region. American Robins continued an interesting biennial pattern unique to the central United States, with relatively high numbers reported last season (74% of sites). Carolina Wren reports reached an all-time high while the proportion of sites reporting House Sparrows fell to an all-time low. Reports of American Crows have stabilized (39% of sites) after a drastic drop in 2003–04 that may have been related to West Nile virus. Before 2003–04, crows were reported from approximately half of all sites in the region.

### **South Central: Goldfinches rebound, robins common**



Reports of American Goldfinches in the South Central region rebounded in 2004–05 to record highs (91% of sites) following the record lows (79% of sites) reported during the previous season. Another big change was detected in American Robin counts. Robins were reported at more than 70% of FeederWatch locations, a 30% increase over the previous winter and the second best showing since 1988. A biennial pattern in robin abundance mirrors the pattern seen in the North Central region—when robins are abundant in the South Central region, they tend to be less common in the North Central region. The pattern may be related to fruit availability at northern latitudes, with robins moving farther south in years with poorer fruit crops.

### **Southwest: Mountain Chickadees up, scrub-jays down**



Similar to the trends detected by FeederWatchers in neighboring California, reports from the Southwest region noted more Lesser Goldfinches and fewer Western Scrub-Jays. Lesser Goldfinch reports reached their highest levels since FeederWatch began, with 36% of sites reporting the species. Dropping from the regional Top 10 was the Western Scrub-Jay. This species fell from #5 to #13, with only 42% of sites recording scrub-jays. The proportion of sites reporting Mountain Chickadees was among the

## **Regional Top 5**

### **North Central 396 participants**

- 1 Black-capped Chickadee
- 2 Downy Woodpecker
- 3 Blue Jay
- 4 White-breasted Nuthatch
- 5 Dark-eyed Junco

### **Mid-Central 291 participants**

- 1 Dark-eyed Junco
- 2 Northern Cardinal
- 3 Downy Woodpecker
- 4 American Goldfinch
- 5 House Finch

### **South Central 303 participants**

- 1 Northern Cardinal
- 2 American Goldfinch
- 3 Mourning Dove
- 4 House Sparrow
- 5 Blue Jay

### **Southwest 387 participants**

- 1 House Finch
- 2 Dark-eyed Junco
- 3 House Sparrow
- 4 Northern Flicker
- 5 Mourning Dove



*Carolina Wren by Gary Mueller of Rolla, Missouri*

highest recorded in FeederWatch history, and the species moved into the regional Top 10. Pine Siskins were reported at 52% of sites, double the number of the previous season's record lows.

## Regional Top 5

### *Great Lakes* 1,227 participants

- 1 Black-capped Chickadee
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 3 Downy Woodpecker
- 4 Blue Jay
- 5 American Goldfinch

### *East Central* 869 participants

- 1 Northern Cardinal
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 3 Dark-eyed Junco
- 4 House Finch
- 5 American Goldfinch

### *Southeast* 838 participants

- 1 Northern Cardinal
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 3 Tufted Titmouse
- 4 American Goldfinch
- 5 Red-bellied Woodpecker

### *North Atlantic* 490 participants

- 1 Black-capped Chickadee
- 2 Blue Jay
- 3 American Goldfinch
- 4 Downy Woodpecker
- 5 Mourning Dove



Long-term declines in Evening Grosbeak reports from the North Atlantic region are striking. Photo by Tammie Haché of Manitouwadge, Ontario.

### *Great Lakes: Redpolls make unexpected return*

Common Redpolls made an unexpected off-year movement into the Great Lakes region and were recorded at nearly as many sites in 2004–05 (43%) as in the major irruption year of 2003–04 (46%). American Robins continued a long-term trend of being seen by more FeederWatchers each winter, jumping from the last spot on the regional Top 25 list in 2003–04 to 15th position last season. Although the Red-bellied Woodpecker expanded its range in the east, populations were stable in the Great Lakes. Red-bellieds were reported from 39% of FeederWatch sites in the Great Lakes region, mostly from sites in southern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ontario.



### *East Central: Consistency at the feeders*

Reports from FeederWatchers in the East Central region held few surprises in 2004–05. There was little change on the list of top feeder birds, with only the Blue Jay dropping from #8 to #11. The Red-bellied Woodpecker, continuing to become more common in the region, replaced the Blue Jay in the Top 10. Carolina Wrens were reported at 53% of sites in the region, an all-time high. Some irruptive finches were reported, with 20% of sites in the region counting Pine Siskins. However, the off-year irruptive movements of redpolls noted elsewhere last winter stopped just north of this region.



### *Southeast: Fruit eaters flourish!*

The 2004–05 FeederWatch season was an impressive one in the Southeast for species that eat fruit in winter. Northern Mockingbird, American Robin, and Eastern Bluebird counts all reached their highest points since FeederWatch began, reported at 60%, 59%, and 47% of FeederWatch locations, respectively. All-time high reports were also recorded for Carolina Wren and Red-bellied Woodpecker (each at 90% of sites). Purple Finch counts were greater than expected, breaking an 11-year “boom-or-bust” pattern that predicted relatively poor counts of the species last winter. Nearly half of the 838 FeederWatchers in the region reported Purple Finches.



### *North Atlantic: Woodpeckers come, grosbeaks go*

The Red-bellied Woodpecker became a new feeder bird in portions of the North Atlantic region last winter. Although the species was rarely recorded in the region since FeederWatch began, nearly 12% of FeederWatchers hosted Red-bellied Woodpeckers in 2004–05. Another somewhat unexpected feeder visitor was the Common Redpoll, reported at 51% of FeederWatch locations. Following the irruption in 2003–04, fewer than 15% of sites were expected to host redpolls last season. On the down side, the continentwide decline in Evening Grosbeak populations has been felt most strongly in the North Atlantic region. One of the most common birds at feeders in the early 1990s, Evening Grosbeaks have dropped to #23 and are at risk of falling out of the regional Top 25.





### **New England: Red-bellied Woodpeckers are here!**



As in the North Atlantic region, the big story at feeders in New England last winter was the rapid range expansion of Red-bellied Woodpeckers. The percentage of sites hosting red-bellieds increased from 15% in 1990 to 56% last winter.

The Tufted Titmouse has also become increasingly common in New England, with 93% of sites now reporting the species at least once during the winter. Carolina Wren reports have steadily climbed since 1997; more than 40% of locations in the region now report the species. In contrast to other regions that experienced two consecutive winters with many irruptive species, the partial irruption of redpolls generally failed to reach New England in 2004–05.

### **Allegheny: Titmice nearly everywhere, crows lose ground**



A slight decrease in reports of Dark-eyed Juncos, typically the most frequently reported species for the Allegheny region, allowed Mourning Dove to take the top spot on the regional list. The long-term increasing trend in Carolina Wren reports has resumed after a brief setback in 2003–

04. Fewer than 20% of participants hosted Carolina Wrens as recently as 1998. However, the species was recorded at least once at nearly 45% of sites in 2004–05. Tufted Titmice, also continuing a northward range expansion, were reported at a record 84% of sites last winter. Declining species included the House Sparrow, with average flock sizes dropping to an all-time low last winter. The proportion of FeederWatch sites in the region hosting American Crows continued a five-year slide that may be partially attributable to the effects of West Nile virus.

### **Mid-Atlantic: House Finch flocks continue to shrink**



The eye disease affecting House Finches all across North America was first reported from the Mid-Atlantic region in the early 1990s. The disease continues to have population-level effects in the region. House Finches were reported at approximately the same proportion of FeederWatch locations last season as in 2003–04, but flock sizes continued to decline and dropped to an all-time low. The average number of House Finches seen at one time in 2004–05 was 3.9, far lower than the double-digit flock sizes of the early 1990s. On the positive side, Carolina Wrens were reported from an all-time high proportion of sites (73%) in the region, bringing the species to #11 on the list of top feeder birds.

### **Call for Hawaiian FeederWatchers**

Unfortunately, we did not receive any 2004–05 FeederWatch reports from Hawaii in time for this publication. Hawaiian FeederWatchers are needed to learn more about the distribution and abundance of the unique birds of the islands, including many introduced species from around the world. Introduced birds have significantly impacted the bird communities of the islands, and citizen scientists are needed to help monitor the continued invasions. If you feed birds in Hawaii, please consider joining Project FeederWatch.

## **Regional Top 5**

### **Mid-Atlantic 888 participants**

- 1 Northern Cardinal
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 3 Dark-eyed Junco
- 4 Black-capped/Carolina Chickadee
- 5 Tufted Titmouse

### **New England 708 participants**

- 1 Black-capped Chickadee
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 3 Dark-eyed Junco
- 4 White-breasted Nuthatch
- 5 Downy Woodpecker

### **Allegheny 1,402 participants**

- 1 Mourning Dove
- 2 Dark-eyed Junco
- 3 Northern Cardinal
- 4 Downy Woodpecker
- 5 White-breasted Nuthatch



*Red-bellied Woodpecker sightings increased dramatically in New England during the winter of 2004–05. Photo by Tonya Black of Derry, New Hampshire.*

**Contribute your  
observations for the  
2005–06 analyses.**

**Join  
Project FeederWatch  
today!**

Attention all Project FeederWatch Participants:

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# Spotlight on FeederWatchers

## Notes from the FeederWatch Mailbox

**BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON,  
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY**

### *Red Crossbills in Arkansas*

Morris Boyd of Lonsdale, Arkansas, wrote to Project FeederWatch in May, 2005, to report Red Crossbills at his feeder. Knowing this was an unusual bird for Arkansas, we encouraged Morris to contact his local Audubon chapter. The folks from the Audubon Arkansas were quite interested, and several members went out to Morris's house. Located in the middle of a mowed, grassy field with only two deciduous trees nearby, Morris's house did not seem like a place to find a crossbill. But Morris had seen not just one crossbill but several—males, females, and juveniles, and he had the photos to prove it. Morris wrote again in June to update us on his birds. He reported that the folks from Audubon were studying his photos to try to determine how old the juveniles were and thereby determine if the crossbills may have nested nearby. Although seeing crossbills in Arkansas is rare, a breeding record would be truly surprising.



*The quantity and quality of photos submitted by FeederWatchers increases each year. Photos that we receive are often used by Project FeederWatch for the calendar, web site, and publications. Photo of Eastern Bluebird in Germantown, Tennessee, by Kevin Carver.*

### *A bobcat visits FeederWatchers in California*

Every season participants write and send photos of mammals visiting their feeder areas. This year we received such a letter from Herman Paulk of San Bernardino, California. On March 23, 2005, he was visited by a bobcat. Herman was napping at the time and awoke to his wife's exclamation, "Hurry, hurry, we've got a bobcat on the patio!" He tried to snap a photo, but wasn't quick enough. The cat came back three days later, however, and this time Herman was able to get photos. By counting the squares on the fence that the bobcat stood next to and jumped over, Herman estimated that the cat was about 21" high and 37" long from the tip of its nose to the stub of its tail—a pretty big cat for the backyard!




*Fences were no obstacle for this bobcat that visited the backyard of FeederWatcher Herman Paulk in San Bernardino, California.*

### *Participant supports FeederWatch in many ways*

Karen McCarthy, of Ada, Michigan, is one of the original FeederWatch participants in the United States. Karen has made quite a contribution by sending us her data for 17 years. However, she has found an additional way to support the project by securing several contributions for Project FeederWatch from her employer. She wrote, "I'm fortunate to work for Consumers Energy, whose Foundation recognizes employee volunteers by contributing to qualifying organizations on their behalf." The Consumers Energy Foundation donated \$100 in

2005, for a total of more than \$500 donated since 1998.

Karen says that she enjoys FeederWatching because "it adds another dimension to the change of seasons and weather and helps scientific research at the same time." Karen, whose interest in birds was fostered by her grandfather and parents, has passed the bird watching bug on to the next generation. She wrote, "Our son has been counting and identifying birds since preschool." He is now a teenager and enjoys FeederWatching with Karen and her husband. 

***More photos and stories:* Read more about fellow FeederWatchers and see featured photos on the FeederWatch web site: [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw)**

# The New Invaders

Exotic species making a home in North America

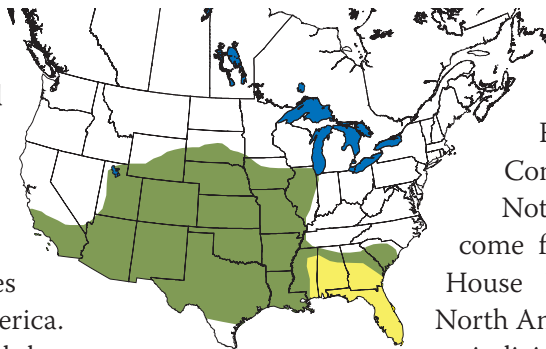
BY MEGAN WHITMAN AND MICHAEL HARVEY,  
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

**M**onk Parakeet, Black-hooded Parakeet, Yellow-chevroned Parakeet, Nutmeg Mannikin, and Red-wiskered Bulbul are species that you may expect to see at a zoo, but in fact all of these species have been seen by FeederWatchers in the state of Florida. Dozens of exotic species can be found in North America, and many species have established viable local populations and are expanding their ranges—they are the new avian invaders.

If you were FeederWatching 100 years ago, some of today's most common feeder visitors would have been considered as "exotic" as Black-hooded Parakeets are to contemporary FeederWatchers. Rock Pigeon, European Starling, and House Sparrow are all species that were introduced in North America. The Rock Pigeon was introduced by colonists in the early 17th century, the House Sparrow was first introduced in the 1850s, and the European Starling became established in the 1890s. All three species now number in the millions and are omnipresent in much of the lower 48 states and Canada. Other introduced species that may be seen at feeders include the Chukar, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Gray Partridge.

A new wave of introduced species is currently moving across North America, most notably led by the Eurasian Collared-Dove. This species of dove is native to the Indian subcontinent and first reached the Western Hemisphere through a release in the Bahamas in the mid-1970s. The Eurasian Collared-Dove quickly spread around the islands and, at some point in the 1980s, dispersed to Florida. In the past five years, sightings by FeederWatchers indicate a rapid expansion out of the Southeast (see map), and FeederWatchers everywhere may see them in the near future.

Most of the exotic finches and parrots seen in North America today are descendents of escaped or unwanted pets. For instance, Monk Parakeets, native to South America, have become locally established through



*The maximum extent of the Eurasian Collared-Dove's range in 2000 (yellow) and 2005 (yellow and green), based on FeederWatch reports.*

*Photo of Eurasian Collared-Dove by Kevin Carver of Germantown, Tennessee.*

independent releases in many areas, including in southern Florida, near Chicago, and in Connecticut.

Not all invading species, however, come from overseas. The range of the House Finch was limited to western North America prior to the release of a few individuals near New York City in the 1940s. House Finches adapted well to the East, quickly spreading and becoming one of the species most often reported by FeederWatchers in North America.

Another native species that is rapidly moving into novel areas is the White-winged Dove. Previously restricted to states along the Mexican border, this species is becoming increasingly common in Florida, the Gulf Coast states, and north into the Great Plains.

In recent years, biologists have recognized the importance of tracking exotic and introduced species. Nonnative birds can impact ecosystems, often with negative consequences for the natives. For example, competition for nesting sites among House Sparrows, European Starlings, and native cavity-nesting birds can affect the reproductive success of native species such as bluebirds. Predicting where the new invaders will show up next is difficult, and documenting sightings can be valuable for understanding the requirements and limitations of species introduced to novel areas. FeederWatchers are encouraged to keep an eye out for unusual feeder visitors and to report sightings—you could help document the next wave of invaders. 