

Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2005-06



CORNELL LAB of ORNITHOLOGY



BIRD STUDIES CANADA
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX CANADA



This second edition of *Winter Bird Highlights* is being published as we begin the 20th anniversary season of Project FeederWatch.

Tens of thousands of citizen scientists from across Canada and the United States have contributed more than 1.1 million checklists during the first 19 seasons. This wealth of information has helped us learn more about the irruptive movements of Common Redpolls, track the spread of the House Finch eye disease across North America, watch as Carolina Wrens and Red-bellied Woodpeckers expand their ranges to the north, monitor a dramatic reduction in sightings of Evening Grosbeaks, and learn an enormous amount about more than 100 species that regularly visit feeders somewhere on the continent. Much has been accomplished in the first 19 years, and many more questions remain about the birds we all enjoy watching.

We hope that our participants are learning as much as we are, and we look forward to hearing about the changes FeederWatchers observe in their backyards over the next 20 seasons. Happy FeederWatching!

*Gambel's Quail photo by Elroy Limmer, Silver City, New Mexico.
Cover photo of Blue Jay by Lyn Winans, Minden, Ontario.*



Focus on Citizen Science is a publication series dedicated to highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This issue, *Winter Bird Highlights 2006*, 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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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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Evening Grosbeaks: Where have you gone?



EVENING GROSBEAKS BY M. L. MILNE

BY DAVID BONTER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

This past winter a few boxes of old bird-banding data were donated to the Lab of Ornithology by a relative of a deceased bander, Stuart Wilson, Jr. As a bird bander myself, I immediately appreciated the meticulous records Wilson had maintained and I began to leaf through the many journals. What amazed me more than anything was the section detailing Wilson's encounters with Evening Grosbeaks.

Between November 1957 and May 1958, Wilson banded 1,336 grosbeaks around his home in Deposit, New York. Most of these birds stayed in the vicinity for extended periods of time, as indicated by the series of dates etched in green ink next to individual band numbers in Wilson's journals. One male grosbeak, #56-162981, was captured 11 times during the winter of 1957–58 and returned for several more winters. It was last captured in April 1962 when the bird was at least six years old.

Wilson's journals are remarkable for many reasons; foremost is the reality that his grosbeak records simply could not be matched today. In fact, Wilson once banded 59 grosbeaks *in a single day*, January 17, 1959. Today, it is almost impossible to *see* 59 grosbeaks in New York in one day, let alone to capture them!

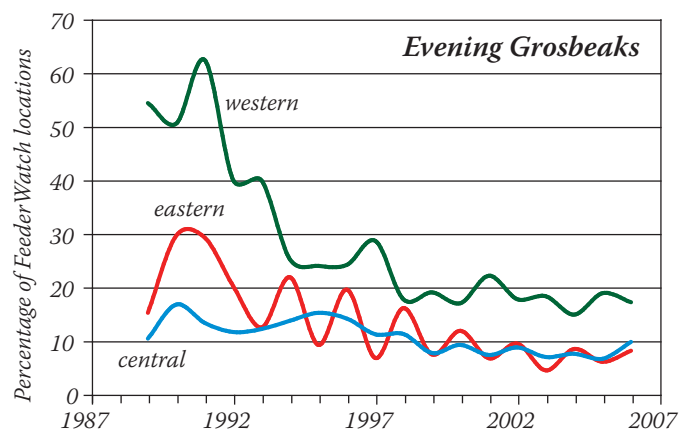
FeederWatchers track population declines

While populations of many species of common feeder birds have done well in recent decades, the Evening Grosbeak stands out as a species in trouble. FeederWatchers from across North America have documented a decline in the prevalence of Evening Grosbeaks.

Once the fifth most common species reported by FeederWatchers in the Rockies and Pacific Northwest (seen at 62% of FeederWatch locations in 1991), grosbeaks have nearly dropped off the charts, falling to #37 (17% of sites) this past season.

The FeederWatchers who are still fortunate to host these beautiful birds have seen the average size of grosbeak flocks dwindle in recent years. The average number of birds visiting feeders in the east dropped 35% between 1989 and 2006, with dramatic declines also recorded in the central part of the continent (-13%) and in the west (-29%).

The factors contributing to the declining grosbeak populations remain a matter of speculation. One theory suggests that changes in spruce budworm abundance have contributed to the declines (grosbeaks feed the larvae to their young). One thing is certain—data from thousands of FeederWatchers have helped us quantify the declines and raise the conservation profile of this species. Further research is required to better understand the changes in Evening Grosbeak populations and identify what steps can be taken to bring these birds back to our feeders.



Decline in the percentage of FeederWatch locations reporting Evening Grosbeaks at least once per season in western (green), central (blue), and eastern (red) North America.



Regional Round-up

Trends and highlights from the 2005–06 FeederWatch season

BY DAVID BONTER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

The 2005–06 FeederWatch season was another success, with more than 98,000 checklists submitted and 13,275 FeederWatch participants. A total of 5.5 million bird sightings were reported. On average, FeederWatch participants reported 11.3 species and 56 birds per checklist. The number of participants submitting data over the Internet continued to increase, with 77% of all data submitted online.

As always, FeederWatch relies upon citizen scientists to help us track the abundance and distribution of common feeder birds. The more participants submitting data, the more we can learn. In some regions, particularly in parts of the West, the limited number of partici-

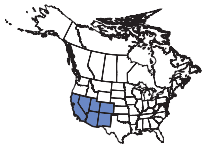
pants makes it difficult to follow population changes. *If you are a FeederWatcher, thank you for helping us learn more about birds.* If you are not yet a participant, we encourage you to join the FeederWatch family (see page 2 for details), and we look forward to hearing about the birds in your yard!

Regional Top 25 Tables

In the pages that follow, the most frequently reported species during the 2005–06 FeederWatch season are shown in a table for each of 6 regions (these regions are groupings of the 15 standard FeederWatch regions). Rankings are based on the percentage of sites reporting the species at least once from November 2005 to April 2006. Ties were broken by giving the species with the greatest average flock size the higher ranking. The tables also include average values for each species since 1989 so that you can compare last winter's results with the historical numbers.

More details online: Interested in learning more about birds closer to home? Visit our web site for Top 25 lists for each state and province. In addition, all confirmed rare bird reports from recent seasons are listed in the Explore Data section of the web site:

www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

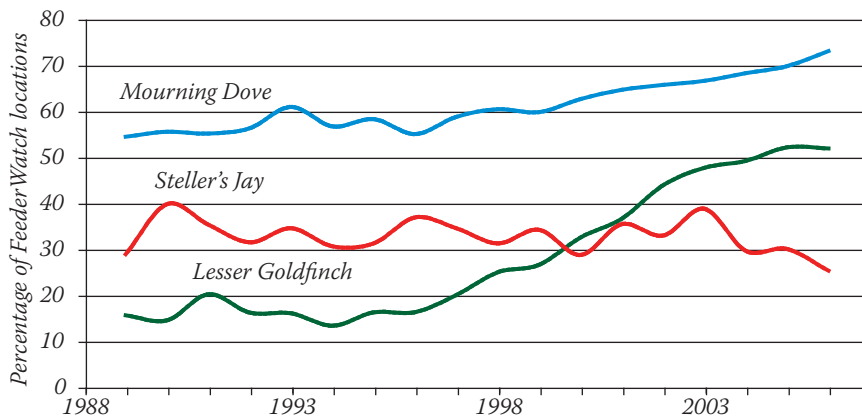


Southwest & California Regions

TOP 25 LIST: 771 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	% Sites	
2005–06	Average		2005–06	Average
1	1	House Finch	91	88
2	2	Dark-eyed Junco	76	82
3	5	Mourning Dove	73	61
4	5	White-crowned Sparrow	61	59
5	4	Scrub-jay*	60	63
6	5	House Sparrow	59	59
7	23	Lesser Goldfinch	52	29
8	10	American Goldfinch	52	46
9	8	American Robin	52	52
10	9	Anna’s Hummingbird	51	48
11	9	Northern Flicker	49	47
12	15	European Starling	35	33
13	12	“Rufous-sided” Towhee*	35	40
14	11	Pine Siskin	34	44
15	14	California Towhee	34	36
16	29	American Crow	31	21
17	21	Sharp-shinned Hawk	30	26
18	23	Northern Mockingbird	29	25
19	27	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	29	22
20	18	“Plain” Titmouse*	28	29
21	17	Golden-crowned Sparrow	28	30
22	25	Downy Woodpecker	28	23
23	31	Cooper’s Hawk	27	19
24	19	White-breasted Nuthatch	27	28
25	32	Bushtit	26	19

* *Scrub-jay* includes *Western* and *Island scrub-jays*; “*Rufous-sided*” *Towhee* includes *Spotted Towhee* and *Eastern Towhee*; “*Plain*” *Titmouse* includes *Oak Titmouse* and *Juniper Titmouse*.



Percentage of FeederWatch locations reporting Lesser Goldfinch (green), Mourning Dove (blue), and Steller’s Jay (red) at least once per season since 1989.

FeederWatchers in the Southwest likely noticed a bit less activity at their feeders last winter. The average flock sizes for the top six species were all below the long-term averages. Lesser Goldfinches, however, continue to be seen at more FeederWatch locations in the southwestern United States each season. Participants reported this species from 52% of FeederWatch locations in the region in 2005–06, up from only 16% of sites in 1988–89. Other species recorded at or near record levels included Mourning Dove, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Cooper’s Hawk. The Black Phoebe—a relative newcomer to FeederWatch lists—was reported from one in five locations.

Corvids, in general, were less common at feeders in the region during 2005–06. Steller’s Jays were only reported from one in four FeederWatch sites in the Southwest, the poorest showing for this species since FeederWatch began 19 years ago. Western Scrub-Jays and Black-billed Magpies were also less prevalent than in recent seasons but still well within the historic range of values for these species.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were confirmed at three locations in California—rare finds for the state. Two participants also photographed sparrows far from their typical winter range, a Clay-colored Sparrow in Redlands, California, and a Harris’s Sparrow in Sebastopol, California. An escaped pet Budgerigar provided some entertainment at the feeders of a FeederWatcher in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



A Western Scrub-Jay enjoys a bath at the home of FeederWatcher Patricia Jones-Mestas, Parker, Colorado.

The season started with many reports of “no birds” at feeders in the Southeast. Indeed, the average flock size reported was below average for 20 of the top 25 species. The relatively mild winter in the region and to the north probably contributed to the lack of activity at feeders. As the winter progressed, observers in most areas saw birds return to their feeders.

Several species were reported from a record-low proportion of locations, including Blue Jay, Dark-eyed Junco, and Northern Flicker. Other species, including Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Bluebird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pileated Woodpecker, and White-winged Dove (see map below) were seen at a record high proportion of FeederWatch locations in 2005–06. White-winged Doves continue to spread along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and throughout Florida. Reports of Northern Mockingbirds and American Robins returned to normal after reaching record highs during the previous season.

FeederWatchers in this region hosted at least 11 western hummingbirds last winter at locations ranging from Virginia Beach, Virginia, to Dade City, Florida (see page 11). Another rare bird highlight was a Bullock’s Oriole photographed at the home of FeederWatcher Fran Rutovsky in Tallahassee, Florida.

Southeast & South Central Regions



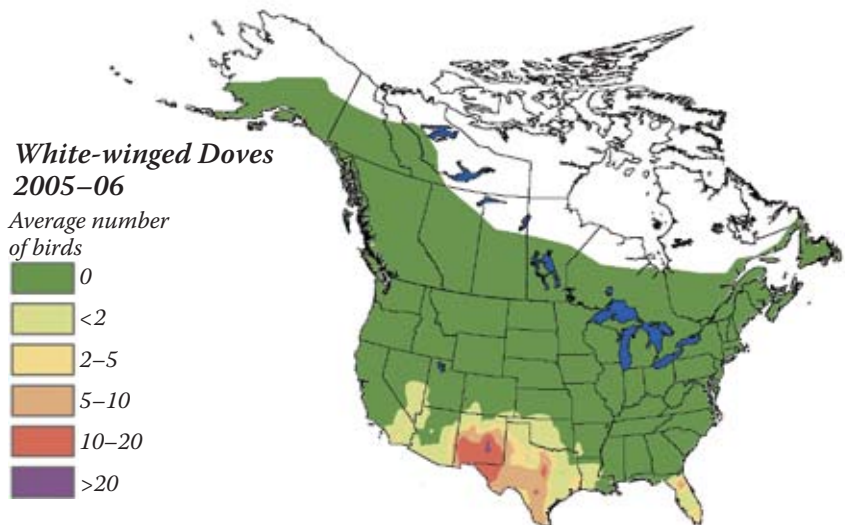
TOP 25 LIST: 1,079 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	% Sites	
2005–06	Average		2005–06	Average
1	1	Northern Cardinal	97	97
2	2	Mourning Dove	92	90
3	4	American Goldfinch	85	84
4	6	Carolina Chickadee	84	78
5	4	Tufted Titmouse	83	84
6	8	Carolina Wren	83	74
7	4	Blue Jay	77	84
8	8	Red-bellied Woodpecker	73	73
9	11	House Finch	71	63
10	13	Downy Woodpecker	69	59
11	12	Northern Mockingbird	66	59
12	10	Dark-eyed Junco	61	67
13	13	American Robin	59	58
14	13	White-throated Sparrow	52	55
15	18	Brown-headed Cowbird	47	44
16	19	Chipping Sparrow	46	41
17	14	Common Grackle	46	52
18	20	Red-winged Blackbird	45	41
19	24	Yellow-rumped Warbler	45	35
20	27	Eastern Bluebird	44	30
21	22	American Crow	43	35
22	22	Brown Thrasher	41	39
23	22	White-breasted Nuthatch	40	37
24	20	“Rufous-sided” Towhee*	37	40
25	21	House Sparrow	36	41

* “Rufous-sided” Towhee includes Eastern Towhee and Spotted Towhee.



WHITE-WINGED DOVE BY ROBERT ELLIOT, PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA



Map: Average number of White-winged Doves reported per count during the 2005–06 FeederWatch season. Values include zero counts from sites not reporting the species.

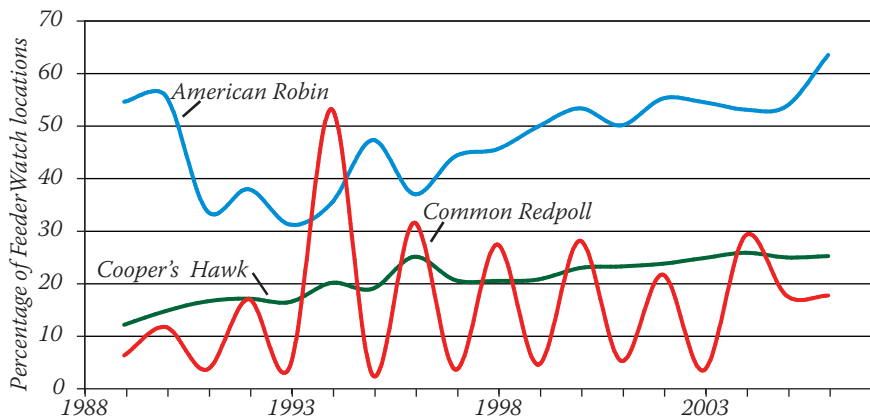


Mid-Atlantic, East Central, Northeast, Great Lakes, Allegheny, & Atlantic Canada Regions

TOP 25 LIST: 5,417 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	% Sites	
2005-06	Average		2005-06	Average
1	1	Chickadee*	97	95
2	2	Mourning Dove	94	92
3	3	Dark-eyed Junco	93	90
4	4	Blue Jay	91	90
5	5	Downy Woodpecker	90	86
6	7	American Goldfinch	90	83
7	6	Northern Cardinal	86	84
8	9	White-breasted Nuthatch	84	76
9	9	House Finch	75	77
10	11	Tufted Titmouse	64	62
11	18	American Robin	63	45
12	10	European Starling	63	68
13	12	House Sparrow	62	64
14	15	Hairy Woodpecker	58	51
15	18	Red-bellied Woodpecker	57	46
16	15	Common Grackle	53	52
17	16	American Crow	53	51
18	20	White-throated Sparrow	50	41
19	17	Song Sparrow	49	47
20	20	Red-winged Blackbird	44	41
21	23	Red-breasted Nuthatch	43	32
22	24	Carolina Wren	40	30
23	22	American Tree Sparrow	36	37
24	22	Brown-headed Cowbird	36	35
25	22	Purple Finch	33	36

* Includes Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee.



Percentage of FeederWatch locations reporting American Robin (blue), Common Redpoll (red), and Cooper's Hawk (green) at least once per season since 1989.

FeederWatchers in these regions reported several species in record-high numbers in 2005-06, including Mourning Dove, Dark-eyed Junco, Downy Woodpecker, American Goldfinch, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, White-throated Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown Creeper, Cooper's Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker, and Wild Turkey. Considering the record-lows recorded in the Southeast (see previous page), these results suggest that many birds wintered farther north than usual last year.

On the down side, it was a relatively poor winter for seeing the irruptive finches in the region, with neither Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak, nor Pine Grosbeak ranked in the top 30. Some redpolls were reported as far south as Pennsylvania and New Jersey, but the species primarily stayed in Canada and New England. FeederWatchers reported few large flocks of siskins outside of the upper Great Lakes.

Among the many rare bird highlights from the region was the extraordinary sighting of a Cape May Warbler that spent much of the winter at the feeders of Fred Bates in Rutland, Vermont. See the rare bird section of the FeederWatch web site for more reports and photos.



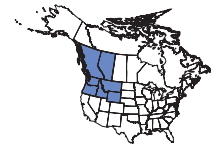
RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH BY LYN WINANS, MINDEN, ONTARIO.

Pine Siskin counts typically fluctuate from season to season, and the single biggest change at FeederWatch sites in these regions between the past two seasons was a major decline (56%) in the number of locations reporting Pine Siskins in 2005–06 following a particularly good year for siskins in 2004–05. FeederWatchers also recorded a 45% decline in the central part of the continent (see maps below). The gaps left at nyjer feeders by the missing siskins were partially filled by American Goldfinches, reported at 41% of sites, the second highest percentage in 19 years.

The proportion of sites hosting Mourning Doves in the region continues to increase, with twice as many sites reporting the species last winter than in winters as recent as 1999. Participants also reported record or near-record highs for Black-billed Magpie, Anna’s Hummingbird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Cooper’s Hawk.

One of the more intriguing rare bird reports came from Cathlamet, Washington, where FeederWatcher George Exum photographed an Ovenbird near his feeders in late November. This warbler typically spends the winter in Central or South America or on islands in the Caribbean. Another similarly lost warbler was a Pine Warbler photographed in Lillooet, British Columbia. A Yellow-headed Blackbird in Kitimat, British Columbia, was also documented outside of its typical winter range.

Pacific Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regions

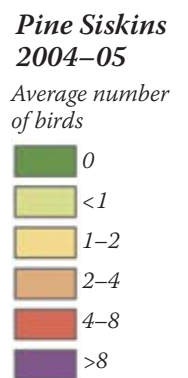
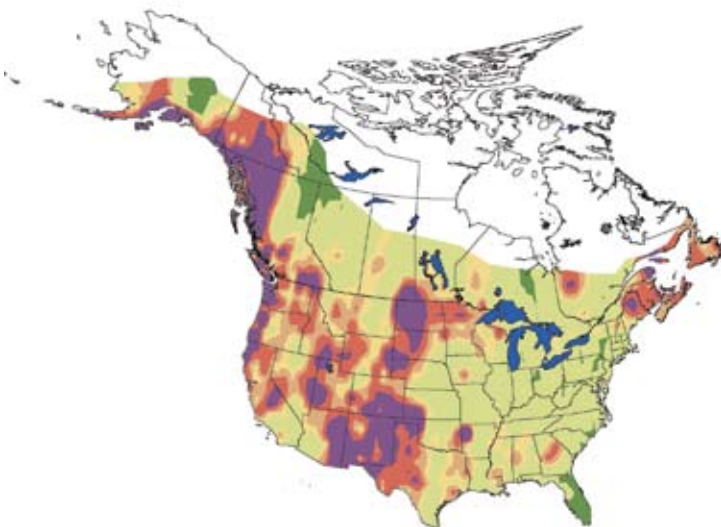


TOP 25 LIST: 802 SITES REPORTING

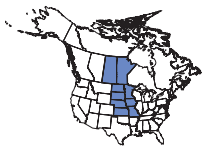
Rank		Species	% Sites	
2005–06	Average		2005–06	Average
1	1	Dark-eyed Junco	87	88
2	2	Black-capped Chickadee	81	80
3	5	Northern Flicker	77	64
4	4	House Finch	73	70
5	7	American Robin	70	57
6	11	Downy Woodpecker	63	51
7	9	Red-breasted Nuthatch	58	54
8	10	Song Sparrow	57	52
9	11	European Starling	55	50
10	9	Spotted Towhee	54	53
11	10	House Sparrow	53	52
12	10	Steller’s Jay	52	51
13	15	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	46	41
14	18	American Goldfinch	41	32
15	15	Varied Thrush	39	40
16	20	American Crow	38	29
17	19	Hairy Woodpecker	34	29
18	6	Pine Siskin	30	62
19	29	Mourning Dove	30	17
20	21	Sharp-shinned Hawk	29	26
21	20	Red-winged Blackbird	28	27
22	21	Fox Sparrow	28	26
23	28	Bushtit	27	18
24	24	Black-billed Magpie	26	22
25	27	Golden-crowned Sparrow	24	19



PINE SISKIN BY ERROL T. ASKIN, SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA



Average Pine Siskin flock size at feeders during the 2004–05 (above) and 2005–06 (opposite page) FeederWatch seasons.

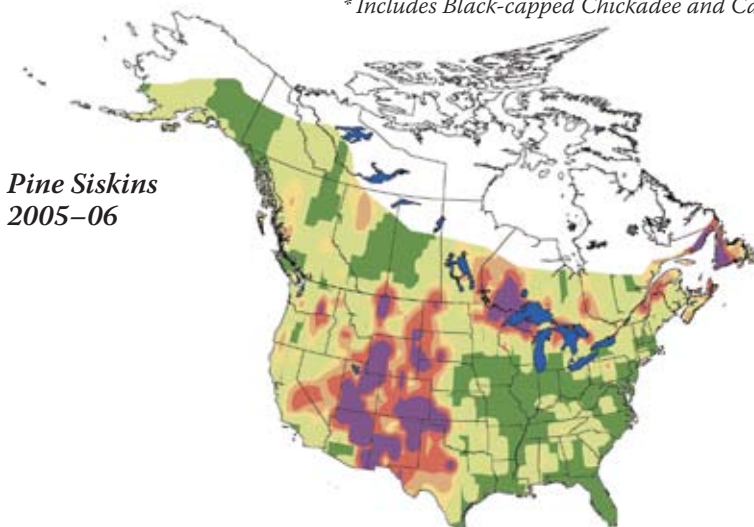


North-Central & Mid-Central Regions

TOP 25 LIST: 599 SITES REPORTING

Rank			% Sites	
2005–06	Average	Species	2005–06	Average
1	1	Chickadee*	92	95
2	3	Dark-eyed Junco	90	90
3	3	Downy Woodpecker	89	88
4	3	Blue Jay	84	89
5	6	American Goldfinch	81	76
6	7	White-breasted Nuthatch	77	73
7	11	House Finch	73	60
8	8	Northern Cardinal	71	70
9	6	House Sparrow	70	79
10	10	Hairy Woodpecker	64	62
11	13	Red-bellied Woodpecker	61	53
12	14	American Robin	61	51
13	14	Mourning Dove	60	51
14	11	European Starling	56	62
15	16	American Crow	45	44
16	15	Common Grackle	41	46
17	17	Purple Finch	40	40
18	19	Northern Flicker	38	35
19	21	Red-winged Blackbird	34	29
20	21	Red-breasted Nuthatch	30	31
21	20	Tufted Titmouse	26	30
22	24	White-throated Sparrow	25	23
23	27	Carolina Wren	25	18
24	20	Pine Siskin	24	34
25	22	American Tree Sparrow	24	27

* Includes Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee.



Pine Siskins
2005–06

As an irruptive species, major changes in the distribution and abundance of siskins between years are expected.

American Robins frequently visit FeederWatch yards in search of fruiting shrubs and water. Nearly 61% of FeederWatchers in the center of the continent reported robins, the second highest showing in the project's 19-year history.

Another species attracted by fruit in the winter is the Eastern Bluebird. Although still not common in the region in winter, bluebirds are being seen by more FeederWatchers each season. In 2005–06, 15% of the region's 599 participants reported bluebirds in their yards, more than double the percentage of participants reporting the species when FeederWatch began in 1988. Many FeederWatchers successfully attract bluebirds by planting fruiting shrubs and, increasingly, by offering live mealworms (see page 16).

As in much of North America, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawk reports are continuing to increase. These bird-eating hawks may be wintering farther north in response to a milder climate or perhaps because of an increase in food availability.

House Sparrows and European Starlings are being seen less often at FeederWatch locations in the region—participants reported both species at a record-low percentage of locations. The apparent change in fortunes of these nonnative species should benefit native species (such as the bluebird) that compete for nesting sites with sparrows and starlings.



AMERICAN ROBINS BY ERIOL TASSIGN, SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA.



BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE BY DAVID CLARY

Alaska & Northern Canada



TOP 10* LIST: 50 SITES REPORTING

Rank			% Sites	
2005-06	Average	Species	2005-06	Average
1	1	Black-capped Chickadee	84	84
2	8	Hairy Woodpecker	70	48
3	5	Black-billed Magpie	66	55
4	7	Downy Woodpecker	62	51
5	2	Common Redpoll	56	78
6	5	Pine Grosbeak	56	59
7	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	56	50
8	5	Boreal Chickadee	50	58
9	11	Common Raven	48	33
10	9	Dark-eyed Junco	44	42

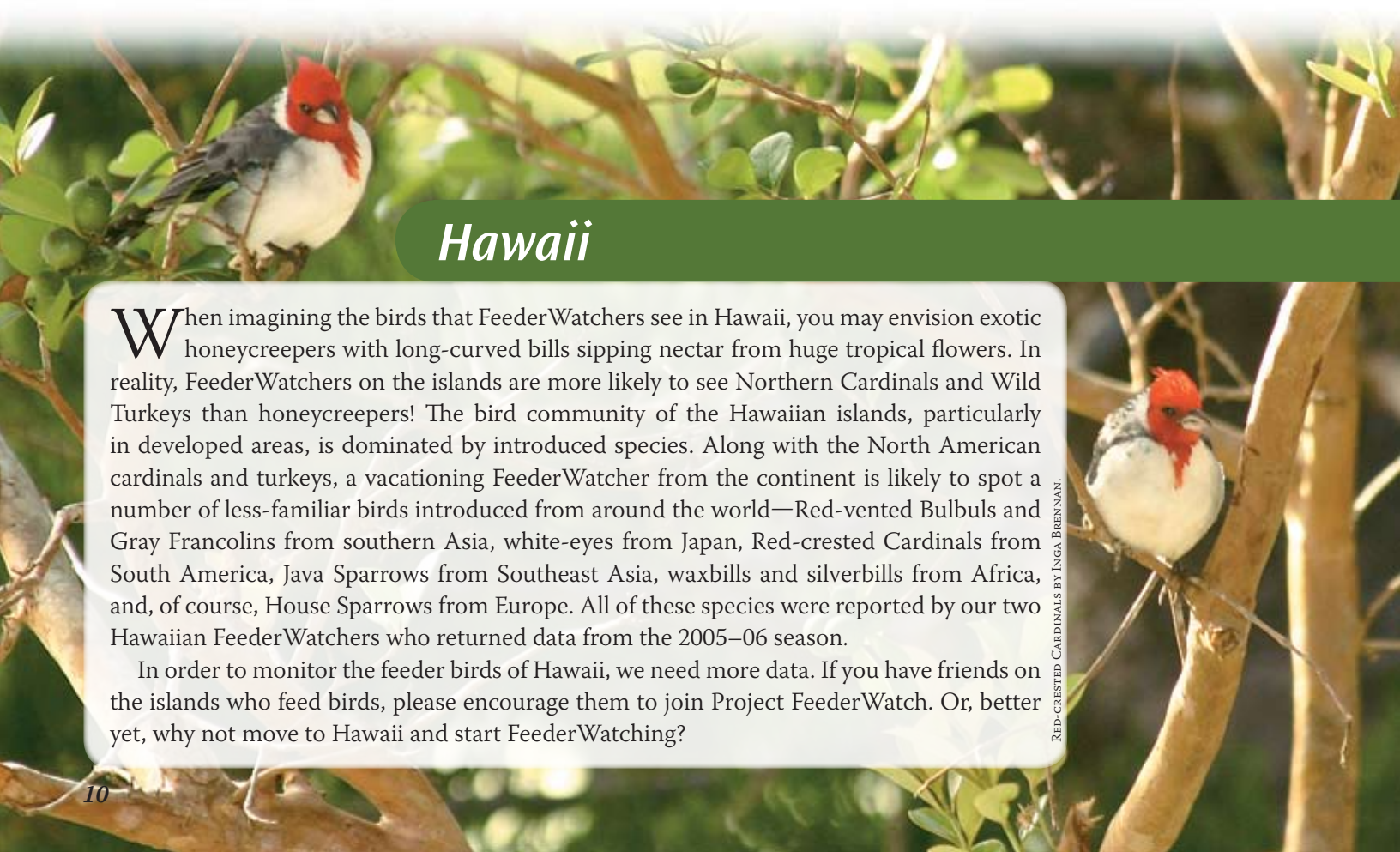
Black-billed Magpies were reported at a record number of FeederWatch locations in Alaska and Northern Canada in 2005-06.

Corvids were the big story for the 50 observers submitting data from Alaska, Yukon, Nunuvut, and the Northwest Territories in 2005-06. Participants at nearly half of all sites reported Common Ravens, more than in any previous season. Other record highs were reached for Black-billed Magpie (66% of sites) and Gray Jay (36% of sites). Steller's Jay reports were average; however the flock size was the highest on record (averaging 2.8 per count).

On the down side, Common Redpolls were reported from a record low of 56% of sites following near-record

* Only the Top 10 species are listed for this region as the diversity of birds in the far north in winter is lower than in the rest of North America.

highs in 2004-05 (92% of sites). Where redpolls were present, flock sizes were greatly reduced (average=9.8) compared with the average 28 birds reported per count during the previous season. Pine Siskins also had an "off" year with the second lowest proportion of sites reporting siskins since 1989.



Hawaii

When imagining the birds that FeederWatchers see in Hawaii, you may envision exotic honeycreepers with long-curved bills sipping nectar from huge tropical flowers. In reality, FeederWatchers on the islands are more likely to see Northern Cardinals and Wild Turkeys than honeycreepers! The bird community of the Hawaiian islands, particularly in developed areas, is dominated by introduced species. Along with the North American cardinals and turkeys, a vacationing FeederWatcher from the continent is likely to spot a number of less-familiar birds introduced from around the world—Red-vented Bulbuls and Gray Francolins from southern Asia, white-eyes from Japan, Red-crested Cardinals from South America, Java Sparrows from Southeast Asia, waxbills and silverbills from Africa, and, of course, House Sparrows from Europe. All of these species were reported by our two Hawaiian FeederWatchers who returned data from the 2005-06 season.

In order to monitor the feeder birds of Hawaii, we need more data. If you have friends on the islands who feed birds, please encourage them to join Project FeederWatch. Or, better yet, why not move to Hawaii and start FeederWatching?

RED-CRESTED CARDINALS BY INGA BRENNAN

Rare Birds

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Baltimore Orioles stay north

The 2005–06 FeederWatch season was the year of unusual Baltimore Oriole sightings. There were nine confirmed reports of orioles in areas of the eastern United States and Canada when the birds should have been spending the winter farther south.

The first report came from Sandy Burnett of Sackville, New Brunswick, in early December. Then Julie Kornman of Nashville, Tennessee, observed an oriole at her feeders from December 12 to 15. Several more orioles showed up at feeders in January and February. From January 1 through March 3, Nancy Hughey of King George, Virginia, hosted as many as seven Baltimore Orioles in her yard where she watched them feed from sap wells drilled into her sugar maple trees by a resident Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. In Staten Island, New York, Susan Friedenberg watched an oriole come to her feeders each morning. She wrote that the bird “landed in my cage-covered platform feeder, took a peanut split, flew to a nearby branch with the nut in its feet, and pecked away at it. Then it flew away until the next day.”

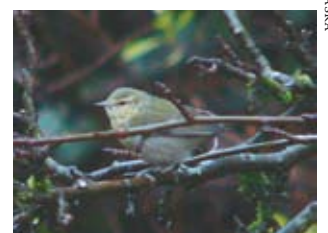
Some orioles regularly winter along the Atlantic coast from North Carolina south through Florida. The majority of the population, however, winters in the Caribbean, Central America, and northern South America.



Nine Baltimore Oriole sightings were confirmed as rare last winter, including this male photographed by Kevin Hall in Redbank, New Jersey.

Alaskan participant hosts several rarities

Jerrold Koerner of Ketchikan, Alaska, hit the jackpot for rare birds last year. Among several late migrant warblers Jerrold found in his yard during the week of November 7 to 13, he found a Tennessee Warbler and a Nashville Warbler. Tennessee Warblers typically winter in Central and South America and the Caribbean and should have been long gone by November. Nashville Warblers winter in coastal California and Mexico but are rare in Alaska even in summer. Jerrold’s most exciting find, however, was a Common Grackle in his yard on November 20. It was only the ninth Common Grackle ever recorded in Alaska!



STEVE HEINL (3), KETCHIKAN, ALASKA



BOB RICHTER

Hummingbirds in the Southeast

A Ruby-throated Hummingbird lingered in Charleston, South Carolina, last winter while western-breeding Rufous Hummingbirds and Allen’s Hummingbirds were seen by FeederWatchers at five locations from Tallahassee, Florida, to Virginia Beach, Virginia. The Allen’s Hummingbird pictured above was recorded at the home of FeederWatcher Fran Rutkovsky in Tallahassee.

Jerrold Koerner found several rare birds in his yard in Ketchikan, Alaska, including a Nashville Warbler (top), a Tennessee Warbler (center), and the ninth Common Grackle ever recorded in the state (bottom).

Climate Change and Feeder Birds of the North

BY KERRIE WILCOX,
BIRD STUDIES CANADA



In 2005–06, Canada experienced its warmest winter since modern record-keeping began, with temperatures averaging 3.9°C above normal. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories were particularly warm, with temperatures 6°–8°C above normal.

Climate conditions affect bird populations at the regional scale and across the continent. Did the warm temperatures affect the kinds and numbers of birds visiting feeders this past winter? Canadian Project FeederWatch participants who submitted bird counts during the winter of 2005–06 provided a wealth of data about the status and trends of feeder-bird populations. FeederWatch reports indicated lower numbers of birds and species than in the last two years, northward range expansion of some southern specialists, and range retractions in others.

Top feeder birds in Canada

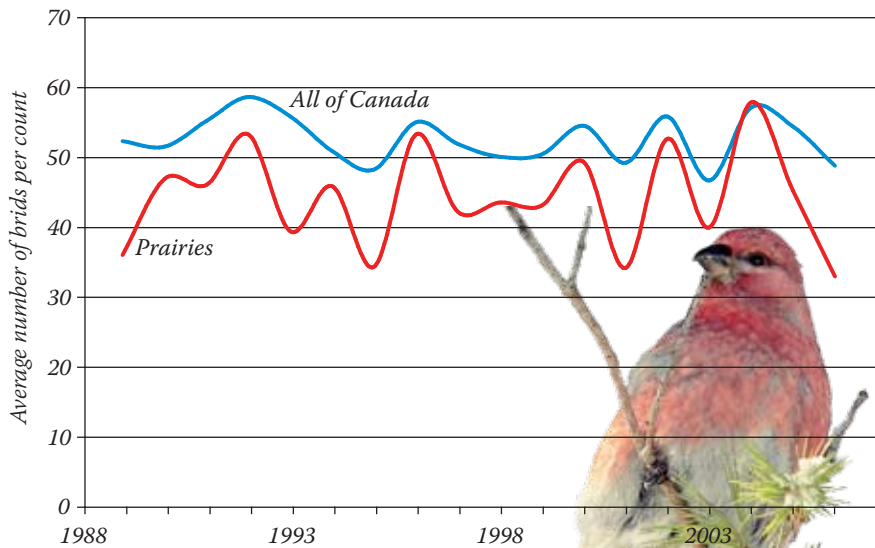
As in previous years, the Black-capped Chickadee topped the list of most common feeder birds in every province except British Columbia. This little bird has been the number one bird in all regions except British Columbia every year since 1997. Also high on the list is Blue Jay. This species was among the top three in every region except British Columbia.

Fewer birds at feeders?

Many FeederWatchers from across Canada commented that they saw fewer birds at their feeders this year and that there was less snow cover in many areas. With less snow cover, it would be expected that more natural food would be available for birds to eat and that birds would visit feeders less often. However, although the average number of individual birds reported per count was lower than in the last two years, the numbers were pretty much the same as the past two decades except in the Prairies. The Prairies—where temperatures were well above normal—experienced the lowest average number of individual birds (32.6) per count since 1989, down from a high of 57.3 in 2004.

“This has been a very unusual winter in Calgary—warmer than usual, less snow cover than usual, and fewer birds coming to our feeders and backyard.”

—Alberta Sweet, Calgary, Alberta



Average number of birds reported per count in the Prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba in red) and all of Canada (blue). Pine Grosbeak photo by Tammie Haché of Manitouwadge, Ontario.

Range Expansions

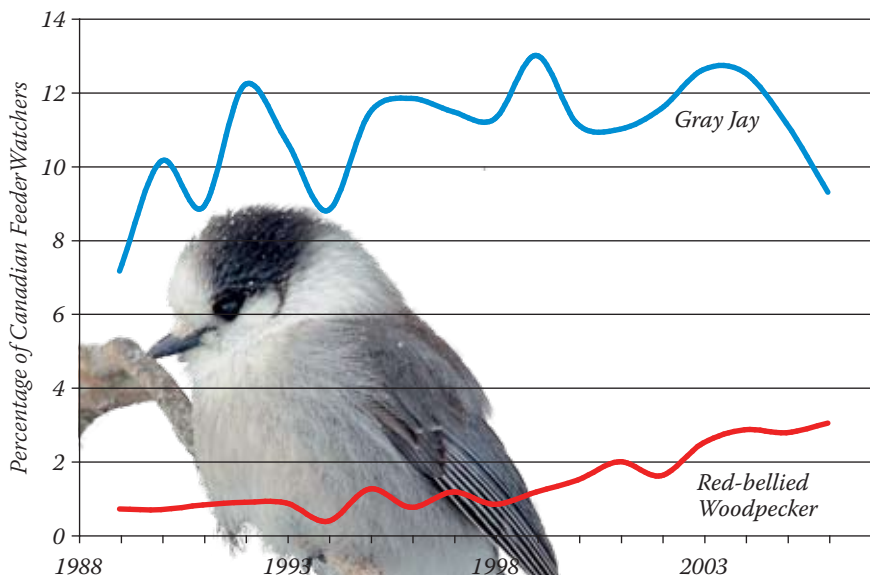
Canadian FeederWatchers reported higher numbers of some southern specialists than ever before: Northern Cardinals, Carolina Wrens, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers were reported at a record percentage of feeders. Participants in southern Ontario also reported other southern feeder species in increasing numbers, including Tufted Titmouse, House Finch, and Wild Turkey.

Northern Cardinals were reported by a whopping 47% of all FeederWatchers in Canada. Historically, Northern Cardinals were found in the southeastern United States, but their range has expanded north and northwest along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. It wasn't until about 1900 that the cardinal's range reached the Great Lakes. By 1910, it was found in southern Ontario. Now it is being reported at many feeders across Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada. This range exten-

sion may be a result of climate change, but an increase in bird feeders is probably also an important factor.

FeederWatchers also reported Carolina Wrens at more feeders than ever before in Canada, though still only in the east. The Carolina Wren is sensitive to cold weather, with the northern populations decreasing markedly after severe winters. The gradually increasing winter temperatures over the last century may be responsible for the northward expansion of this wren's range. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas—due to be published in September 2007—also noted the range expansions of Carolina Wrens and other southern-associated species such as Northern Mockingbird and Red-bellied Woodpecker.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker, a bird whose range has been creeping northward from its core in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern states over the last decade, was recorded at 14% of feeders in Ontario last winter. This represents a fairly steady increase from 3% in 1989. There have been reports in Quebec as well during the last four seasons. Why the rise in Red-bellied Woodpeckers? It's impossible to know for sure, but a range expansion in a species such as the Red-bellied Woodpecker could be a sign that climate changes are making northern regions more hospitable.



Percentage of Canadian FeederWatch locations reporting Gray Jay (blue) and Red-bellied Woodpecker (red) at least once per season. Gray Jay photo by Tammie Haché of Manitouwadge, Ontario.

Range retractions

It would be expected that birds located at the southern edge of their range would retract with warmer climatic conditions. However, Canadian FeederWatchers are concentrated in populated areas (i.e., in the south), so FeederWatch data may not pick up on northward range retractions. One feeder species that may show this trend is the Gray Jay. The percentage of feeders visited by Gray Jays has been declining since a peak of 13% of feeders in 1999.

Climate change may be altering the Gray Jay's habitat in the southern end of its range. While other birds fly south to warm places for the winter, the Gray Jay

(Continued on page 14)

Which Species is It?

Identifying the confusing House Finch, Purple Finch, and Cassin's Finch

BY MICHAEL HARVEY, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

The identification of the House Finch, Purple Finch, and Cassin's Finch can be difficult. Each species is about the same size and shape, and each is a common visitor to feeders within its respective range. The males have varying shades of red or purple along with brown and white coloring, and the females are all brown and white. What's more, the ranges of these birds overlap, primarily because of the broad distribution of the House Finch. In certain areas of the West, it is possible to encounter all three species!

New bird quilt book

Jodie Davis—a FeederWatcher, author, and well-known quilter—has written a new book, *Backyard Bird Quilts*, featuring quilting patterns for several common birds. Not only did Jodie dedicate the book to Project FeederWatch, but she will donate a portion of the royalties she receives from the sale of the book to Project FeederWatch. Visit your favorite local or online bookstore to order.



Thanks, Jodie!

Need more help with tricky bird identification?

Visit the *About Birds and Bird Feeding* section of the FeederWatch web site for more help identifying confusing species:
www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

Or, visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "All About Birds" web site for an amazing online field guide:
www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds


Range expansions and retractions in Canada (continued from page 13)

stays put, surviving on tiny bits of food it has stored in an estimated 100,000 places, usually under scales of bark on spruce trunks and branches.

Dan Strickland has been studying Gray Jays in Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, for the last 40 years. His study showed that the Gray Jay population is declining because the jays are not reproducing well enough to replace those that die. The problem may be that most of the food they store is perishable, and climate change delays the onset of sub-zero temperatures. As a result, their stored food may be spoiling. The food caches could even become poisonous, and birds sickened by tainted dinners might delay nesting and lay fewer eggs.

Summary

As interesting as the expansion and declines of bird species might be, Royal Ontario Museum ornithologist Mark Peck sees real long-term dangers for many birds in a warming landscape. Warming contributes to a more unpredictable system for wildlife, and unpredictability is usually not a good thing. The regions where changes are likely to be most marked are places like the northern boreal forest and the Canadian arctic.

FeederWatchers are providing valuable data documenting the effect that an unusually warm winter has on feeder bird populations as well as possible range expansions and contractions with a warming climate. 

Females

House Finch

The House Finch has a relatively slim body and a short, stubby bill that is curved on top. The tail is relatively long and only slightly notched.

The female House Finch is the most nondescript of the three species, lacking the strong facial pattern of Purple Finch females. The underparts are dull white with long brown streaks that are not well-defined. The feathers under the tail have broad, dark streaks.



KEVIN CARVER

Purple Finch

The Purple Finch has a relatively plump body with a fairly large head and short, conical bill. The tail is short and deeply notched.

Female Purple Finches (and young males) have a bold face pattern with a bright white eyebrow, a dark cheek patch, and a white stripe at the bottom of the cheek, giving the face a striped appearance. The underparts show heavy, broad streaks. The feathers under the tail are usually white with no obvious streaks (diagnostic if visible).



CHRIS WOOD

Cassin's Finch

The Cassin's Finch has a slightly larger body with a large head that often appears peaked. The bill is relatively long and straight.

Faint white eyebrow and moustache stripes are visible on the face of a female Cassin's Finch, though they are less obvious than on the female Purple Finch. A pale eyering is sometimes visible. The bright white underparts contrast with narrow, sharply defined streaks. The feathers under the tail show well-defined dark streaks.



DANIEL HUNT

Males



JEFF AND CHERYL HURD



M. L. MILNE



CHRIS WOOD

The colorful parts of male House Finches vary in intensity from yellow to orange to red, although it is almost always less purple or rosy than in the other two species. Yellow birds are seen in the West more often than in the East. The richest color is on the forehead and chest. A "headband" of red contrasts with the brown cap and brown cheek patch. The red chin, upper throat, and breast contrast with conspicuously streaked sides. The brown wings and back, sometimes lightly washed with red, contrast with the bright red rump. The tail is dull brown.

The male Purple Finch shows a deep reddish-purple color on most of the head, back, and chest—looking as if someone took a streaky, brown-and-white bird and dipped it in raspberry jam. The richest color is on the head and chest. There is a lighter stripe over the eye. The raspberry color carries onto the hindneck (unlike Cassin's and House Finch). The reddish color of the throat and breast diffuses into a variable but usually faintly streaked lower breast and belly. There is extensive red color on the back in eastern birds, less red in Pacific birds.

Male Cassin's Finches have a bright red crown that varies in intensity but always contrasts sharply with the pinkish-reds found elsewhere on the face and chin. The crown is the brightest part of the bird and contrasts with the brown hindneck. Overall, Cassin's Finches lack the strong facial pattern of Purple Finches. A narrow, whitish eyering may be visible at close range. The throat, sides of the neck, and upper breast are rosy-pink, quickly fading into finely streaked sides. The brown wings and back, tinged rosy-red, fade into a pinkish rump.

FeederWatching Tips

Try something different to attract birds to your yard

BY MEGAN WHITMAN,
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

FeederWatchers frequently write us asking for advice on how to attract more birds to their yards. Although adding another bird feeder is often a good start, there are also a number of alternatives you may try to supplement your feeder-bird menu.

Mmmmm...mealworms!

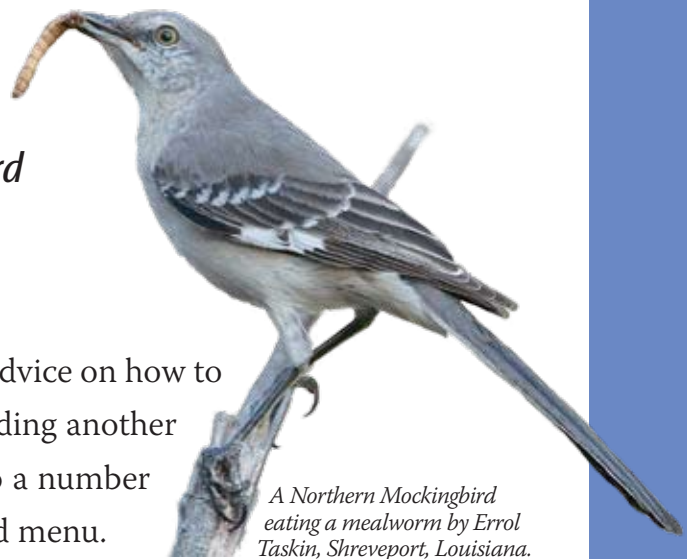
During winter months, birds don't have access to the insects they eat during the summer. FeederWatchers who supplement their feeding stations with mealworms or waxworms are often delighted with the number of birds attracted by the worms. Mealworms are the larval forms of darkling beetles (*Tenebrio* sp.), and waxworms are the larval stage of the greater wax moth (*Galleria mellonella*). Both are relatively high in fat and protein content. You might find them at a local pet store, fishing shop, or wild bird store, and they can be ordered over the Internet. Depending on the demand at your feeder, you might try offering them once a day or once a week. As soon as birds discover them, the worms will quickly disappear!

Birdscaping your yard

Creating a natural, bird-friendly backyard habitat using native plants and fruiting shrubs and trees will benefit many birds—not just those that visit your feeders. Smart landscaping will provide natural food for birds throughout the warmer months, and some plants may hold their fruit well into the winter. Check with a local botanist, landscaper, or cooperative extension office for information about



Pine Grosbeak eating berries in Palmyra, Maine, by Janet Bowden.



A Northern Mockingbird eating a mealworm by Errol Taskin, Shreveport, Louisiana.

"I put some mealworms out for my Hermit Thrush. He found them right away, ate some, and then sat fat and dozing on a branch outside my window. When the cup was empty, he'd continue checking—as if they would spontaneously generate!"

—Carol Brockfield, Medford, Oregon

which plants are native to your area. Be sure to seek advice on what grows best in your local soil conditions and in the sunny or shaded areas of your yard.

All birds need water

Water is a popular, inexpensive attractant that many people overlook. A dependable supply of fresh, clean water will attract birds to your yard that might not normally visit your feeders. An easy-to-clean, shallow bird bath is best. Initially place the bird bath approximately 3–5 meters (~10–15 feet) from nearby vegetation. Then try experimenting to find the best placement for the bath in your yard. The water source should be close enough to vegetation to provide nearby cover for birds, but far enough away to prevent predators from using the vegetation as cover from which to hunt. Place an "island" in the center of the bath or attach some branches to the sides to make sure birds can drink without getting wet or exit safely after a bath. Dripping water or moving water is a welcome sound to birds in freezing or dry weather. A variety of electrical water heaters are on the market to keep your water feature from freezing if you live in a cold climate. (Do not use any chemical additives to keep the water from freezing!) Change the water daily, give the bath regular, thorough cleanings, and enjoy watching the birds flock to your yard!

