

Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2006-07



CORNELL LAB of ORNITHOLOGY



BIRD STUDIES
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX CANADA

*Celebrating
20 years of
FeederWatching*

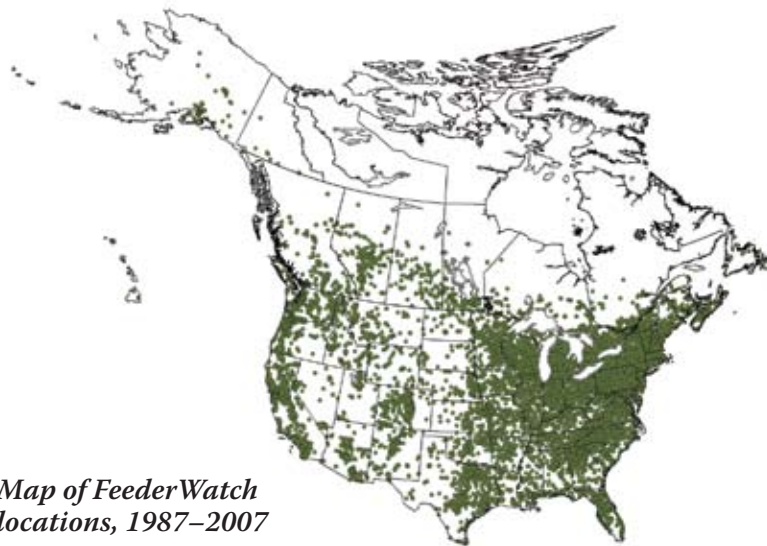


In this third edition of *Winter Bird Highlights* we celebrate 20 years of monitoring the abundance and distribution of birds at feeders across North America.

Project FeederWatch was born in 1987 when Dr. Erica Dunn approached the Cornell Lab of Ornithology about partnering with the Long Point Bird Observatory (now Bird Studies Canada) to expand the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey, which she started in the province in 1976. More than 4,000 people joined FeederWatch that first year, representing nearly every state and province. Of those early participants, we are thrilled that 119 U.S. and 70 Canadian participants are still counting birds for Project FeederWatch. Since that initial winter, nearly 40,000 people have joined the FeederWatch family, with most participants returning year after year.

FeederWatch has now accumulated the world's largest database on feeder bird populations, allowing us to accurately monitor the winter abundance and distribution of dozens of North American species. The analyses presented in this issue focus on changes detected over the past 20 years.

This *Winter Bird Highlights* is dedicated to our "original" FeederWatchers and all that have followed. We hope that you will join us for 20 more years of watching and learning about the birds at our feeders.



Map of FeederWatch locations, 1987-2007

Cover photo of *White-throated Sparrow* by Gary Mueller, Rollo, Missouri.

Focus on Citizen Science is a publication series dedicated to highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This issue, *Winter Bird Highlights 2007*, is brought to you by Project FeederWatch, a joint research and education project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.

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

Project FeederWatch Staff

David Bonter

Project Leader, USA

Janis Dickinson

Director of Citizen Science, USA

Kristine Dobney

Project Assistant, Canada

Wesley Hochachka

Research Associate, USA

Anne Marie Johnson

Project Assistant, USA

Rosie Kirton

Project Support, Canada

Denis Lepage

Senior Scientist, Canada

Megan Whitman

Project Assistant, USA

Kerrie Wilcox

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.

United States

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

159 Sapsucker Woods Road

Ithaca, NY 14850

1-800-843-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/volunteer/pfw

Focus on Citizen Science Staff

David Bonter

Editor

Janis Dickinson, Wesley Hochachka

Technical Editors

Diane Tessaglia-Hymes

Design Director

Susan E. Spear

Graphic Designer

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Rare Birds

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON AND DAVID BONTER,
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Seeing an unusual or rare bird at your feeders is always an exhilarating experience—even if it is a species that you regularly see at a different time of the year. Many FeederWatchers experienced this thrill last winter, and 169 unexpected reports were confirmed with photographic evidence. Highlights included a Lazuli Bunting from Port St. Lucie, Florida, one of only a handful of records of this species ever in the state. A Western Tanager visited a feeding station in Baldwin, New York, when the species should have been somewhere between southern California and Panama. A Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch frequented feeders in Longlac, Ontario, located well to the east of other rosy-finches. Numerous Brown Thrashers were reported north of their typical winter range, with confirmed reports from Colorado, Michigan, Montana, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Vermont. Also lingering north of their usual winter locales were Yellow-bel-

lied Sapsuckers found in Michigan and Minnesota. A few hardy warblers attempted to brave the cold winter weather, including Northern Parulas found in Delaware, Ohio, and Georgia when they should have been in Florida or points south. Photos of a Common Redpoll came from Fort Bragg, California, well to the south of the normal winter distribution of redpolls. Also seen in California were two Central American species, a Rufous-backed Robin and a Rufous-collared Sparrow. The latter bird was several hundred miles north of its normal range—it may have escaped from captivity to be so far out of range.

Be sure to keep a camera handy in the event that an unexpected visitor drops by your feeding station. For a complete list and photos of confirmed rare birds from the 2006–07 season, visit the FeederWatch web site. 📷

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD BY DELANO ARVIN

Hummingbirds continue to dazzle

Every year we hear reports of hummingbirds in strange places—often western species showing up at feeders north and east of their winter ranges. This year was no exception, with 27 confirmed reports of hummingbirds outside of their historic winter range. Most were Rufous, Calliope, or Allen's hummingbirds, which typically winter in Mexico but are being seen in increasing numbers in the southeast and Gulf Coast states.

One Rufous Hummingbird unexpectedly wintered at the home of FeederWatcher Gary Mueller in Rolla, Missouri. The bird arrived on November 10 and stayed until February 15, visiting Gary's feeders every day. Keeping a hummingbird fed in winter can be a challenge. In December Gary wrote, "Our temperatures have been so cold even during the daytime that I had to start using two hummingbird feeders. In the morning the sugar liquid in the feeder is completely frozen. I bring it indoors and replace it with another feeder that has been inside. It usually takes several hours for this new feeder to freeze, and I then start the procedure all over again." Gary found that if he didn't swap the feeders quickly enough, "The hummingbird definitely let me know about it by flying around the area and making its concerned vocalization." Despite all the hard work, Gary greatly enjoyed hosting his special visitor. You can see a video of Gary's hummingbird on the FeederWatch web site.



Notes from Project FeederWatch

Long-term participants receive a “thank-you”

To help celebrate the dedication and contributions of the 20-year FeederWatch participants, Chronicle Books donated copies of a new book called *Bird Songs* to each of the original 119 U.S. participants who are still FeederWatching. The book includes a built-in sound system that plays recordings of the 250 featured birds. The sounds are real bird songs from the Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. For the 70 Canadian participants who have been FeederWatching for 20 years (and some even longer in Ontario!), Bill Reid donated the book *Birds at Your Feeder*. This book, written by FeederWatch founder Erica Dunn and former project leader Diane Tessaglia-Hymes, features information learned through the project. We are extremely grateful for these donations, which allowed us to acknowledge the service of our “original” participants.

Upon receiving their books, the response from the long-term participants was overwhelming. Many wrote about memorable experiences gained by closely monitoring their feeders for the past 20 years. For example, several lamented the recent lack of Evening Grosbeaks—a species that they used to see in abundance. Other participants wrote about new arrivals, such as the Carolina Wren, that they have seen in recent years but never saw when they first started FeederWatching. Dorothy Herweg of Ballwin, Missouri, wrote of her surprise that 20 years had passed. “It’s been a very enjoyable experience, and I appreciate the fact that it’s a small contribution to collecting data on our beautiful feathered friends.”

A lasting contribution

Virginia Panarace of Cape Elizabeth, Maine, was a long-term FeederWatcher who had to leave the program in



PHOTO BY BARBARA WENGGARTEN

“Thank you for encouraging a young woman with a budding interest in birds to develop that interest into a lifetime passion while contributing to scientific study of the avian world.”

—Mary Strasser, 20-year FeederWatcher
Onalaska, Wisconsin



FEEDERWATCHER MARY STRASSER. PHOTO BY MIKE STRASSER

2001 as age interfered with her ability to participate. Although Virginia has unfortunately passed on, she has left a lasting legacy for FeederWatch. Her 92 archived counts continue to help us better understand changes in bird populations and will always be a valuable contribution to the birds that she loved. In addition, Virginia left a \$5,000 gift to FeederWatch. Her generous bequest will help the program continue to thrive as new generations of FeederWatchers help monitor new generations of birds.

School creates FeederWatch habitat

The Carmel Middle School in Carmel, California, is a model for schools everywhere. Thanks to the initiative and efforts of Craig Hohenberger, a dedicated science teacher, the school created “The Habitat”—a seven acre marvel featuring native coastal scrub, chaparral, and grassland communities. The Habitat is a center for environmental education with a mission to inspire students to understand, appreciate, and protect the environment. An earthen amphitheater surrounding feeders in The Habitat provides an ideal location for students to participate in Project FeederWatch. The sixth grade students conduct the official FeederWatch counts each year and submit their reports via the Internet. The habitat is indeed inspirational, as FeederWatch staff from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology learned on a visit in

Students watch the feeders in “The Habitat” at the Carmel Middle School in Carmel, California.

October 2006. Learn more by visiting the project's web site at <www.carmelhabitat.org>, and encourage a similar project in your community.

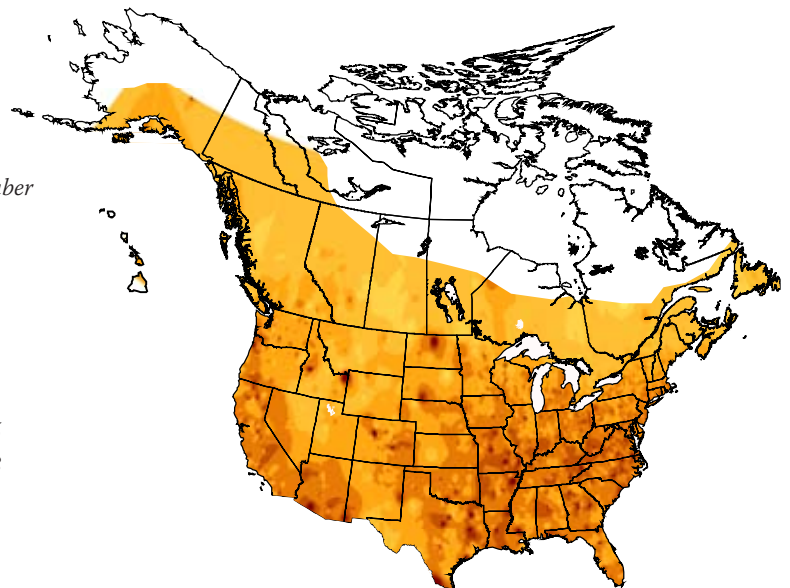
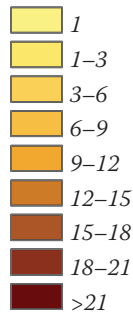
Finches vs. sparrows

House Sparrow populations are declining globally. Although many North Americans are not overly concerned about the fate of a species like the House Sparrow that is nonnative, understanding the factors that influence changes in House Sparrow populations may help us better understand the factors that are affecting our native birds. FeederWatch reports were recently analyzed by Lab of Ornithology researchers as part of a study examining potential competition between House Finches and House Sparrows. Prior to the mid-1990s, House Finch populations were increasing while House Sparrow populations declined. Then the House Finch Eye Disease reduced finch flocks in many areas. With fewer finches around, sparrow populations stabilized, suggesting a link between House Finch and House Sparrow abundance. The research was published in the prestigious journal *Ecology** in April 2007. 🐦

*Cooper, C. B., W. M. Hochachka, and A. A. Dhondt. 2007. Contrasting natural experiments confirm competition between House Finches and House Sparrows. *Ecology* 88:864–870.

MELANISTIC WHITE-WINGED DOVE BY JOHN PAVESI, CEDAR PARK, TEXAS

Average number of species



Average number of species per checklist submitted, 2007

FEEDERWATCH STATISTICS

39,959 Participants submitting counts to FeederWatch since 1987.

Average number of species per checklist in Kentucky in 2007, the most of any state or province. **14.8**

1.1 Average number of species per checklist in Nunavut in 2007, the least of any state or province.

Average number of birds reported per checklist in Nevada in 2006–07, the most of any state or province. **128.3**

1.5 Average number of birds reported per checklist in Nunavut in 2006–07, the least of any state or province.

Estimated total hours participants spent FeederWatching in 2006–07. **196,451**

\$2.9 MILLION Value of time contributed to bird monitoring by FeederWatchers in 2007, assuming \$15 per hour.

Would you recognize this unusual White-winged Dove? The dove is melanistic—meaning that areas of the bird are darker than usual. The darkness is caused by an abnormal deposition of the pigment melanin in the feathers.



The Rise and Fall of House Finches in Canada

BY KERRIE WILCOX,
BIRD STUDIES CANADA



Illegal trade, explosive population growth, and a devastating disease are all part of the dramatic story of the House Finch.

Canadian FeederWatchers have observed profound changes at their feeders over the past 20 seasons, with perhaps no changes as widely experienced as those in House Finch populations. FeederWatchers across North America helped record a rapid expansion of this species' range and increases in the number of finches at feeders. More recently, FeederWatch data have documented a decline of House Finch populations in many areas, and have tracked the spread of a disease that has contributed to the species' recent change in fortunes.

House Finch history

House Finches readily come to backyard feeders where the colorful males and the birds' gregarious personalities make them a favorite of FeederWatchers. The finch is native to the southwestern United States and Mexico where they can be found in dense thickets, deserts, orchards, and suburban areas. In the early 20th century, these finches were popular cage birds and were sold illegally, marketed as the "Hollywood Finch." The species was introduced to eastern North America in the 1940s when several vendors and owners released caged House Finches on New York's Long Island in order to avoid prosecution for illegally possessing the birds (keeping native birds in captivity is illegal without special permits under Canadian and U.S. law).

The introduced House Finches rapidly multiplied in the 1960s and 1970s and colonized much of the eastern United States and southeastern Canada. The first recorded nesting of the species in eastern Canada was in 1978 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. During the 1980s the

Ontario Bird Feeder Survey documented an extensive range expansion in Ontario. Since FeederWatch began in 1987, participants documented the expansion of this species' range in southern Ontario and into southwestern Quebec. By the winter of 1997–98, FeederWatchers in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward's Island, and New Brunswick were recording House Finches. The species was recorded in Labrador by FeederWatchers for the first time in 2000, and in 2001 the finches were recorded in Newfoundland. The range expansion continues as House Finches were recorded as far north as northern Ontario—245 km north of Red Lake, Ontario, along the Manitoba border—during the winter of 2006–07.

At the same time that the introduced population was growing, the species also expanded north and east from its native range. House Finches spread from the southwestern United States and Mexico to colonize areas as far north as southern British Columbia and the prairie provinces in the last century. During the initial season of FeederWatch, participants in south-central British Columbia recorded the species as did a few participants in Alberta. More recently, Canadian FeederWatchers have helped document the spread of the species into south-central Alberta and Saskatchewan, and into southern Manitoba. In 2000, the eastern and western House Finch populations began to overlap in Saskatchewan and the Great Plains states.

An adaptable finch

Following introduction in the East, House Finches adapted well to their new environments and their high fecundity rate led to rapid population growth. House Finches breed during the first spring after they are born and, on average, fledge three young per nest. Pairs routinely raise three broods per season. Alteration of natural habitats has also created favorable conditions for

House Finches, as these birds are well-suited to a sub-urban existence.

The House Finch quickly evolved to thrive in its introduced range. Scientists noted that by the early 1960s more than one third of eastern House Finches were migrating (moving more than 80 km during winter), generally to the southwest in the fall and to the northeast in spring.* The appearance and morphology of eastern birds has also changed over several generations. Eastern birds have become more grayish brown and dusky red and have developed shorter wings and tails, larger bills, and significantly shorter legs and toes than their western ancestors.** Adaptation to different diets could be driving these changes in body proportions and bill size. House Finches in the East may be more dependent on bird feeders and may have adapted to consume larger food items like sunflower seeds.

Devastating disease

Just as House Finches appeared destined to become the most common feeder bird in North America, a disease brought about drastic changes in their populations. The disease is caused by the bacteria *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (MG), a common respiratory pathogen that was previously only known to infect domestic poultry. One obvious symptom of the novel strain of this disease is puffy eyes that may be swollen shut in severe cases. MG probably spreads among House Finches through physical contact between an infected bird and a non-infected one, ingestion or inhalation of the bacteria, or direct contact of the eye with infected surfaces.

FeederWatchers in the Washington, DC, area first noticed sick House Finches in January 1994. By the next FeederWatch season, all participants were asked to report the presence or absence of the diagnostic eye symptoms in birds as part of the House Finch Disease Survey. The resulting data showed that the disease quickly became an epidemic. MG was first reported in the native populations of the Northwest in 2002 and is now found in House Finches across the continent.

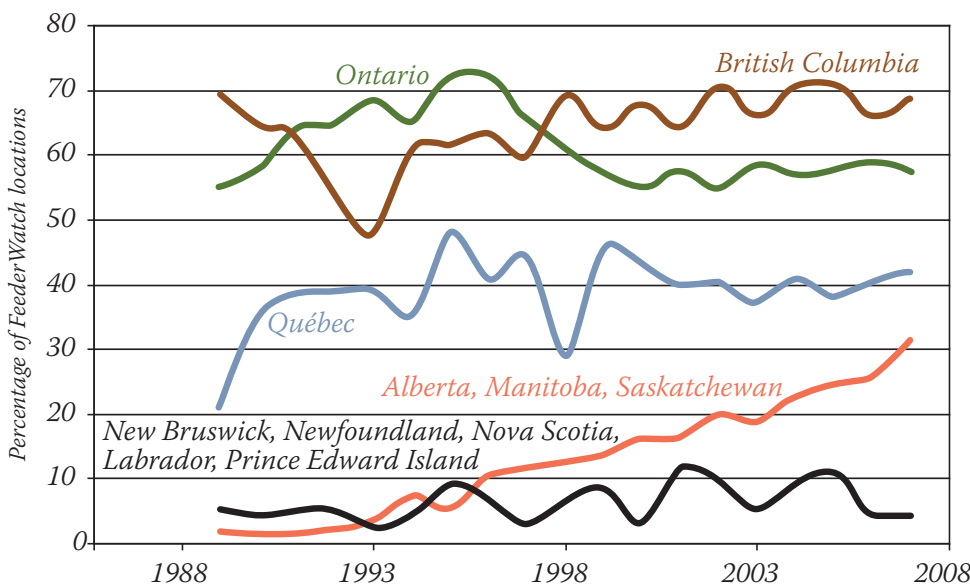
The future of House Finches

What's the future of the House Finch in North America? MG shows no signs of going away but finch populations have generally stabilized. The number of House Finches in the East is currently estimated to be 60 percent lower than prior to emergence of the disease.

FeederWatchers' continued observations will allow us to track future changes. FeederWatchers help monitor the disease by recording the number of healthy and sick House Finches they see during regular FeederWatch counts. Observations may also be reported through the House Finch Disease Survey web site at any time <www.birds.cornell.edu/hofi>; reports of healthy birds are as important as reports of sick birds. Thanks to all FeederWatchers for shedding light on this amazing story.

* Able K. P. and J. R. Belthoff. 1998. Rapid 'evolution' of migratory behaviour in the introduced House Finch of eastern North America. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London Series B*. 265:2063-2071.

** Aldrich, J. W. and J. S. Weske. 1978. Origin and evolution of the eastern House Finch population. *The Auk* 95:528-536.



Percentage of FeederWatch locations reporting House Finches at least once per season during 1989-2007.

House Finch showing the diagnostic signs of a *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (MG) infection. While House Finches are most commonly observed with symptoms of MG, some other species, mostly other finches, have shown signs of infection.

SICK HOUSE FINCH BY RAYMOND BELHUMEUR, SAINT-HUBERT, QUEBEC



Regional Round-Up

Trends and highlights from the 2006–07 FeederWatch season

BY DAVID BONTER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Thanks to 7,140 FeederWatch participants contributing data from all across the United States and Canada, the 20th season of Project FeederWatch was an amazing success! Participants submitted 102,286 checklists from the season, reporting more than 5.9 million birds.

The data contributed to Project FeederWatch between November and April each winter (the FeederWatch season) help us track and better understand changes in bird populations.

Thank you, FeederWatchers, for contributing counts that allow us to study trends in feeder-bird populations! If you are not yet a FeederWatch participant, we invite you to join, contribute your observations, and learn to

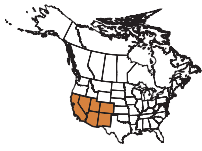
watch the birds in your own area from a new perspective (see page 2 for details on how to participate).

Regional Top-25 tables

As it is our 20th anniversary, we focused on long-term trends in addition to notable findings from the winter of 2006–07 in the round-up that summarizes what participants reported from various regions. The following pages contain information for each of seven regions that include states and provinces that share similar feeder-bird communities. The Top-25 lists are based on the percentage of FeederWatch locations in that region that hosted each species at least once between November 2006 and April 2007. The tables also include information on trends for each species over the history of FeederWatch. For more detailed information including Top-25 lists from individual states and provinces, please visit the Explore Data section of the FeederWatch web site.

The Dark-eyed Junco has been reported on more checklists than any other species in 20 years of FeederWatching. Photo by Jeff Hurd, Millport, New York.





Southwest & California Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 740 SITES REPORTING

| Rank | Rank | | Percentage of Sites | |
|------|---------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| | 2006–07 | Average | 2006–07 | Average |
| 1 | 1 | House Finch | 91 | 88 |
| 2 | 2 | Dark-eyed Junco | 78 | 82 |
| 3 | 5 | Mourning Dove | 76 | 62 |
| 4 | 5 | White-crowned Sparrow | 64 | 59 |
| 5 | 8 | American Robin | 63 | 52 |
| 6 | 4 | “Scrub-Jay”* | 60 | 63 |
| 7 | 22 | Lesser Goldfinch | 60 | 30 |
| 8 | 6 | House Sparrow | 60 | 59 |
| 9 | 9 | Northern Flicker | 55 | 48 |
| 10 | 10 | American Goldfinch | 55 | 47 |
| 11 | 9 | Anna’s Hummingbird | 53 | 48 |
| 12 | 12 | Spotted Towhee | 47 | 40 |
| 13 | 26 | Ruby-crowned Kinglet | 37 | 23 |
| 14 | 14 | California Towhee | 37 | 36 |
| 15 | 15 | European Starling | 35 | 33 |
| 16 | 25 | Yellow-rumped Warbler | 32 | 23 |
| 17 | 19 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 32 | 29 |
| 18 | 18 | “Plain” Titmouse* | 32 | 29 |
| 19 | 28 | American Crow | 31 | 22 |
| 20 | 24 | Downy Woodpecker | 31 | 24 |
| 21 | 23 | Northern Mockingbird | 31 | 25 |
| 22 | 31 | Cooper’s Hawk | 30 | 20 |
| 23 | 12 | Pine Siskin | 30 | 43 |
| 24 | 18 | Golden-crowned Sparrow | 30 | 30 |
| 25 | 21 | Sharp-shinned Hawk | 30 | 27 |

* *Scrub-Jay* includes *Western* and *Island scrub-jays*; “*Plain*” *Titmouse* includes *Oak Titmouse* and *Juniper Titmouse*.

Lesser Goldfinch is the species to watch in the Southwest as reports continue to increase. Prior to 1998 this species was an infrequent feeder visitor, failing to make the Top 20 in any FeederWatch season. FeederWatchers reported more Lesser Goldfinches during the 2006–07 season than at any time since 1988 and reached #7 on the regional Top-25 list.

Mourning Doves have also become more common in the region over the past 20 years. These doves were reported by 20 percent more FeederWatchers during the 2006–07 FeederWatch season than during the early years of the project. Additionally, FeederWatchers reported record-high counts of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, American Robins, and Yellow-rumped Warblers in the region last winter. Kinglets have rarely made the Top-25 list but ended the 2006–07 FeederWatch season at #13.

Bushtits and Common Ravens are two species to look for in the region. These birds are not yet common at feeders but are being reported from more FeederWatch sites each year.

Steller’s Jays, on the other hand, are becoming harder to find in the Southwest. Formerly a regular species in the regional Top 15, Steller’s Jays dropped out of the Top 25 last season, to their poorest ranking (#27) since FeederWatch began. Only 29 percent of sites reported these jays in 2006–07, compared with approximately 35 percent per year in the early 1990s.

Numerous nonnative species have established self-sustaining populations in the Southwest, and many of these species regularly visit feeders. Peach-faced Lovebirds (left) visited the count site of FeederWatcher Arlene Scheuer in Phoenix, Arizona. A Yellow-chevroned Parakeet (center) and a Nutmeg Mannikin (right) were photographed at the count site of Keri Dearborn in Woodland Hills, California.



Expect two species of doves to bring new sights and sounds to feeders in the next 20 years as White-winged Doves and Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to expand their ranges in the region. Both species were seen at more FeederWatch sites last season than at any time in the history of FeederWatch.

Warblers also highlight the twenty-year trends in the south and south-central regions. Both Yellow-rumped (#15) and Pine (#26) warblers reached all-time high ranks in 2006–07. Yellow-rumped Warblers were rarely ranked in the Top 25 prior to the 1999–2000 season but have reached the Top 20 for the past six seasons. The increasing number of Pine Warbler reports will probably bring this species into the regional Top 25 in coming seasons.

On the downside, reports of Common Grackles, a former Top 10 species, dropped to an all-time low at #17. Purple Finches are also increasingly difficult to find at feeders in the South, seen at only 25 percent of sites. Blue Jay reports, however, rebounded last winter following record lows in 2005–06.

Tanagers were unexpected surprises at some FeederWatch locations. Summer Tanagers were recorded in Texas and Florida where the species is typically only found during the breeding season. Vagrant Western Tanagers were found wintering in Georgia and returned for another winter to a FeederWatch site in Tallahassee, Florida, that regularly hosts these “lost” tanagers.

Southeast & South Central Regions



TOP-25 LIST: 1,108 SITES REPORTING

| Rank | | Species | Percentage of Sites | |
|---------|---------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| 2006–07 | Average | | 2006–07 | Average |
| 1 | 1 | Northern Cardinal | 98 | 97 |
| 2 | 2 | Mourning Dove | 94 | 90 |
| 3 | 4 | American Goldfinch | 87 | 84 |
| 4 | 6 | Carolina Chickadee | 85 | 79 |
| 5 | 7 | Carolina Wren | 84 | 74 |
| 6 | 4 | Blue Jay | 84 | 84 |
| 7 | 4 | Tufted Titmouse | 83 | 84 |
| 8 | 8 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 79 | 74 |
| 9 | 11 | House Finch | 75 | 64 |
| 10 | 13 | American Robin | 74 | 59 |
| 11 | 13 | Downy Woodpecker | 74 | 60 |
| 12 | 12 | Northern Mockingbird | 72 | 60 |
| 13 | 10 | Dark-eyed Junco | 70 | 67 |
| 14 | 13 | White-throated Sparrow | 59 | 56 |
| 15 | 23 | Yellow-rumped Warbler | 52 | 35 |
| 16 | 19 | Chipping Sparrow | 51 | 42 |
| 17 | 14 | Common Grackle | 48 | 51 |
| 18 | 27 | Eastern Bluebird | 48 | 31 |
| 19 | 18 | Brown-headed Cowbird | 47 | 44 |
| 20 | 20 | Red-winged Blackbird | 46 | 42 |
| 21 | 20 | “Rufous-sided” Towhee* | 44 | 41 |
| 22 | 22 | American Crow | 43 | 36 |
| 23 | 22 | Brown Thrasher | 43 | 39 |
| 24 | 22 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 43 | 38 |
| 25 | 21 | House Sparrow | 38 | 41 |

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

Sam and Allie Comer of Port St. Lucie, Florida, photographed spectacular flocks of Painted and Indigo buntings (below) at their FeederWatch count site. A Lazuli Bunting (not shown), rare for the state, joined the flock for much of the 2006–07 season.





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

TOP-25 LIST: 4,907 SITES REPORTING

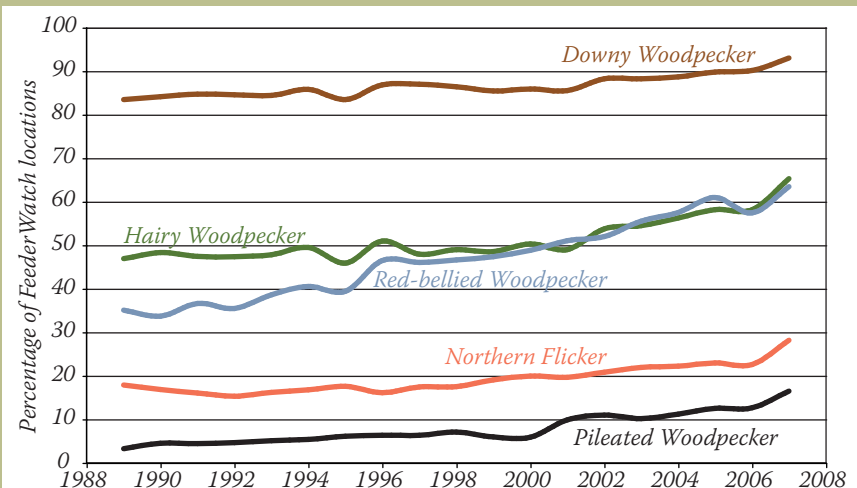
| Rank | Rank | | Percentage of Sites | |
|------|---------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| | 2006-07 | Average | 2006-07 | Average |
| 1 | 1 | "Chickadee"* | 96 | 95 |
| 2 | 3 | Dark-eyed Junco | 95 | 90 |
| 3 | 2 | Mourning Dove | 94 | 92 |
| 4 | 5 | Downy Woodpecker | 93 | 87 |
| 5 | 4 | Blue Jay | 92 | 90 |
| 6 | 7 | American Goldfinch | 90 | 83 |
| 7 | 6 | Northern Cardinal | 87 | 84 |
| 8 | 9 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 81 | 76 |
| 9 | 9 | House Finch | 75 | 76 |
| 10 | 10 | European Starling | 71 | 68 |
| 11 | 11 | Tufted Titmouse | 67 | 63 |
| 12 | 12 | House Sparrow | 66 | 64 |
| 13 | 15 | Hairy Woodpecker | 65 | 51 |
| 14 | 17 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 64 | 47 |
| 15 | 17 | American Robin | 63 | 46 |
| 16 | 16 | American Crow | 59 | 51 |
| 17 | 15 | Common Grackle | 57 | 52 |
| 18 | 17 | Song Sparrow | 56 | 47 |
| 19 | 20 | White-throated Sparrow | 50 | 41 |
| 20 | 20 | Red-winged Blackbird | 49 | 41 |
| 21 | 24 | Carolina Wren | 47 | 31 |
| 22 | 22 | Brown-headed Cowbird | 43 | 35 |
| 23 | 22 | American Tree Sparrow | 42 | 37 |
| 24 | 22 | Purple Finch | 36 | 36 |
| 25 | 31 | Cooper's Hawk | 32 | 16 |

* Includes Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee.

Woodpeckers have done well in the northeastern quarter of North America over the last several decades. FeederWatch reports from the region show that Downy, Red-bellied, Hairy, and Pileated woodpeckers, and the Northern Flicker, were all reported from more FeederWatch locations during 2006-07 than in any previous year. Increasing forest cover in many areas due to the abandonment of former agricultural land may be benefiting the woodpeckers.

Other species with increasing trends over the past 20 years include American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, and Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks. Individuals of all four of these species are likely staying farther north during winter than in the past, contributing to the observed changes.

Warblers lingered in many areas well into the winter last year. Among the unexpected late sightings were Black-throated Blue Warblers visiting feeders in Massachusetts, Maryland, and Ontario. A Black-throated Gray Warbler, typically found west of the Rocky Mountains, was photographed in New Jersey. A Yellow-throated Warbler and an Ovenbird were also found at feeders in the region. Indigo Buntings were recorded late into the winter in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ontario.



One of the more unexpected birds of the season was a Yellow-headed Blackbird photographed by Allan Wirth, a FeederWatcher in Craryville, New York.

Northern Flickers continued their march toward the top of the charts in the region, seen by 79 percent of FeederWatchers, an all-time high. The flicker did not make the regional Top 10 during the early years of FeederWatch.

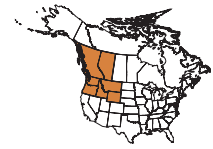
Anna's Hummingbirds are also being reported at more sites. This species entered the regional Top 25 for the first time, jumping 25 spots in the past 12 years. Supplemental feeding may be contributing to increased survival at the northern limits of this hummingbird's winter range.

On the down side, declining trends in a number of finches raise some concern for feeder-bird populations in the region. Evening Grosbeak, formerly a Top 5 species, continued a drastic decline and ended last winter at #40 with only 14 percent of sites reporting this large finch. Pine Siskin, a species in the Top 6 each FeederWatch season prior to 2002, failed to reach the Top 10 during the past two seasons. Likewise, Purple Finches were regularly in the Top 20 prior to 2002—this species has been ranked at or below 25 for the past six seasons.

Band-tailed Pigeons, although never common feeder birds, have also continued a steady decline over the past two decades.

A notable rare bird report from last winter included a Western Tanager in Oregon when the bird should have been in southern California or Mexico.

Pacific Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regions



TOP-25 LIST: 815 SITES REPORTING

| Rank | | Species | Percentage of Sites | |
|---------|---------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| 2006–07 | Average | | 2006–07 | Average |
| 1 | 1 | Dark-eyed Junco | 91 | 88 |
| 2 | 2 | Black-capped Chickadee | 80 | 80 |
| 3 | 5 | Northern Flicker | 79 | 64 |
| 4 | 4 | House Finch | 74 | 70 |
| 5 | 7 | American Robin | 70 | 58 |
| 6 | 10 | Downy Woodpecker | 63 | 52 |
| 7 | 9 | Song Sparrow | 60 | 53 |
| 8 | 9 | Spotted Towhee | 57 | 53 |
| 9 | 10 | Steller's Jay | 56 | 52 |
| 10 | 11 | European Starling | 56 | 50 |
| 11 | 9 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 55 | 54 |
| 12 | 10 | House Sparrow | 53 | 52 |
| 13 | 15 | Varied Thrush | 51 | 41 |
| 14 | 6 | Pine Siskin | 51 | 62 |
| 15 | 15 | Chestnut-backed Chickadee | 48 | 41 |
| 16 | 18 | American Goldfinch | 42 | 33 |
| 17 | 19 | American Crow | 35 | 29 |
| 18 | 19 | Hairy Woodpecker | 35 | 29 |
| 19 | 21 | Fox Sparrow | 33 | 26 |
| 20 | 20 | Red-winged Blackbird | 31 | 27 |
| 21 | 28 | Bushtit | 30 | 19 |
| 22 | 21 | Sharp-shinned Hawk | 30 | 27 |
| 23 | 29 | Mourning Dove | 28 | 18 |
| 24 | 27 | Golden-crowned Sparrow | 25 | 19 |
| 25 | 41 | Anna's Hummingbird | 24 | 12 |

EVENING GROSBEEK BY TAMMIE HACHÉ, MANITOUWADGE, ONTARIO



BAND-TAILED PIGEON BY CHARLOTTE VAN ZANT-KING, NAPA, CALIFORNIA



PURPLE FINCH BY JEANNE A. K. HEY, OXFORD, OHIO



Most Wanted: Evening Grosbeaks, Band-tailed Pigeons, and Purple Finches are among a number of species that are being seen at fewer FeederWatch locations in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain region each year.



North-Central & Mid-Central Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 622 SITES REPORTING

| Rank | 2006-07 | | Percentage of Sites | |
|------|---------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| | Average | Species | 2006-07 | Average |
| 1 | 3 | Downy Woodpecker | 94 | 89 |
| 2 | 1 | "Chickadee"* | 92 | 95 |
| 3 | 3 | Dark-eyed Junco | 92 | 90 |
| 4 | 3 | Blue Jay | 88 | 89 |
| 5 | 6 | American Goldfinch | 79 | 76 |
| 6 | 7 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 78 | 73 |
| 7 | 11 | House Finch | 74 | 60 |
| 8 | 8 | Northern Cardinal | 72 | 70 |
| 9 | 10 | Hairy Woodpecker | 70 | 62 |
| 10 | 6 | House Sparrow | 70 | 78 |
| 11 | 13 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 65 | 54 |
| 12 | 14 | American Robin | 62 | 52 |
| 13 | 14 | Mourning Dove | 60 | 51 |
| 14 | 11 | European Starling | 59 | 61 |
| 15 | 16 | American Crow | 48 | 45 |
| 16 | 19 | Northern Flicker | 43 | 35 |
| 17 | 15 | Common Grackle | 42 | 45 |
| 18 | 17 | Purple Finch | 37 | 40 |
| 19 | 21 | Red-winged Blackbird | 35 | 29 |
| 20 | 20 | Tufted Titmouse | 30 | 30 |
| 21 | 24 | White-throated Sparrow | 29 | 23 |
| 22 | 22 | American Tree Sparrow | 29 | 27 |
| 23 | 27 | Carolina Wren | 29 | 18 |
| 24 | 29 | Pileated Woodpecker | 27 | 16 |
| 25 | 21 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 24 | 31 |

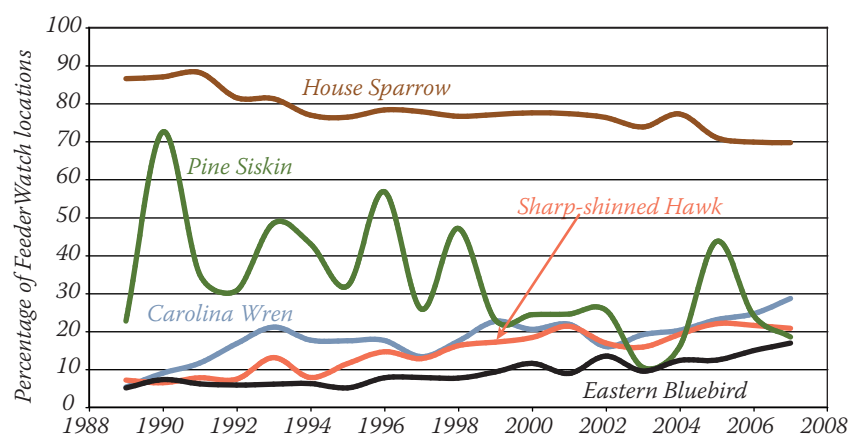
* Includes Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee.

Carolina Wrens, Eastern Bluebirds, and Pileated Woodpeckers are among a number of species that are becoming more common at feeders in the center of North America. Reports of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are also on the rise. Although each of these species was seen at less than 29 percent of sites, reports have been steadily increasing over the course of the project. Carolina Wrens are expanding their range into the region, woodpecker and bluebird populations are likely increasing (possibly due to habitat improvements), and the hawks are probably lingering in more northerly areas than they have historically.

Although House Sparrow reports have stabilized in the past three years, the species is seen at far fewer sites than when FeederWatch began. Approximately 85 percent of sites hosted these nonnative sparrows in the early 1990s, compared with 69 percent in 2006-07.

As in other areas, Pine Siskins made a poor showing in this region last winter. Routinely a Top 25 species prior to 2003 and as high as #6 (1990), siskins failed to make the Top 30 during the 2006-07 season and were seen at only 18 percent of sites.

Interesting rare bird reports from the region included a Townsend's Solitaire found in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Varied Thrush were documented last season in Woodbury, Minnesota, and Grosse Isle, Manitoba.



EASTERN BLUEBIRD BY TONYA BLACK, SOUTH DERRY, NEW HAMPSHIRE.





PINE GROSBREAK BY NICK SAUNDERS, SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

Alaska & Northern Canada



TOP-10 * LIST: 48 SITES REPORTING

| Rank | | | Percentage of Sites | |
|---------|---------|------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| 2006–07 | Average | Species | 2006–07 | Average |
| 1 | 2 | Common Redpoll | 92 | 79 |
| 2 | 1 | Black-capped Chickadee | 79 | 84 |
| 3 | 4 | Pine Grosbeak | 67 | 60 |
| 4 | 7 | Downy Woodpecker | 63 | 52 |
| 5 | 8 | Hairy Woodpecker | 60 | 48 |
| 6 | 5 | Black-billed Magpie | 58 | 55 |
| 7 | 7 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 54 | 50 |
| 8 | 5 | Boreal Chickadee | 50 | 57 |
| 9 | 11 | Common Raven | 50 | 34 |
| 10 | 9 | Dark-eyed Junco | 42 | 42 |

Pine Grosbeaks were one of the most common species seen at feeders in Alaska and Northern Canada during the 2006–07 FeederWatch season.

The relatively small number of FeederWatchers covering a vast area in Alaska, Yukon, and Nunavut makes estimating trends in regional bird abundance tricky. The last two seasons, however, have been the poorest on record for Pine Siskins, seen at only 17 percent of sites in 2006–07. Reports of this irruptive species vary considerably from year to year—more than half of the FeederWatchers in the region have reported siskins in some previous seasons. As in Alaska and northern Canada, siskins were relatively difficult to find across the continent last year.

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

Other irruptive finches, including the Common and Hoary redpolls, were abundant at feeders last winter following a poor showing during 2005–06. Common Redpolls were seen at 36 percent more FeederWatch locations in 2006–07 than in the previous year. Hoary Redpolls were reported from a record-high 38 percent of locations last winter, more than double the number of sites reporting this finch during the previous FeederWatch season. Last winter was also the best season on record for reports of Sharp-shinned Hawks.

Notable rare bird reports came from FeederWatcher Mariis Kilcher in Homer, Alaska. Mariis hosted Cedar Waxwings and a Lincoln’s Sparrow—species well north of their expected winter range.

COMMON MYNA BY CHRIS WOOD

Hawaii



You don’t need to travel around the world to see birds from all continents—just watch a bird feeder in Hawaii. Our two participants submitting counts from the islands reported a wide variety of birds from North and South America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. In fact, all of the Top-10 species were nonnative: Java Sparrow, Zebra Dove, Spotted Dove, House Finch, Common Myna, Japanese White-eye, Yellow-fronted Canary, Northern Cardinal, Common Waxbill, and African Silverbill. Missing from FeederWatch lists were any species native to the islands with the exception of a long-distance migrant, the Pacific Golden-Plover.

Which Species Is It?

Identifying the confusing Chipping Sparrow and American Tree Sparrow

BY DAVID BONTER AND ANNE MARIE JOHNSON,
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Sparrows are notoriously difficult to identify, which is why they are sometimes affectionately called “Little Brown Jobs.” The winter-plumaged Chipping Sparrow and the American Tree Sparrow may be two of the most difficult sparrows to distinguish.

The ranges of these species typically overlap only during migration, but Chipping Sparrows are being found increasingly north of their traditional winter range.

Chipping Sparrow

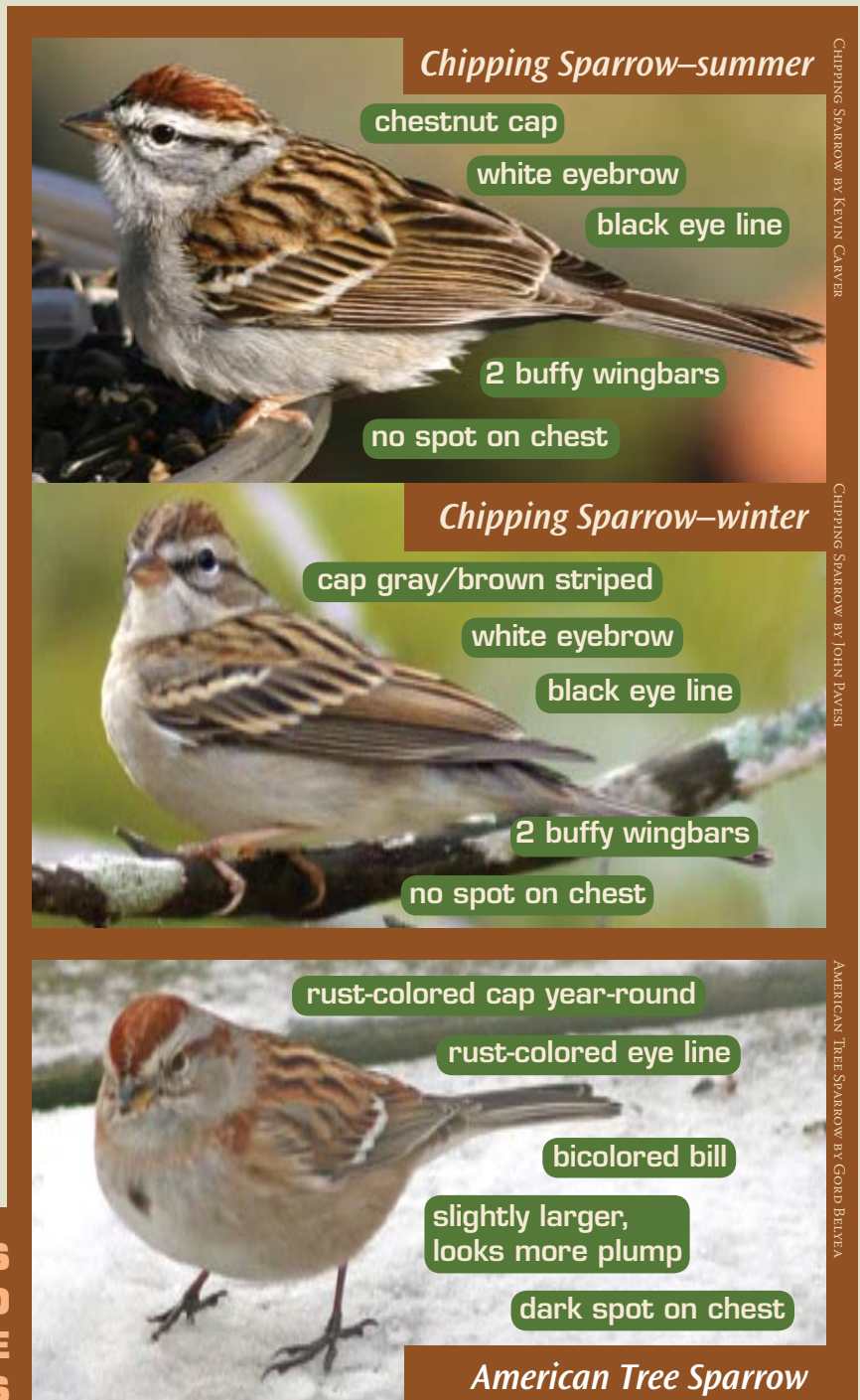
In the summer, the small Chipping Sparrow (5.5 inches or 14 cm long) has a chestnut cap, a distinct white eyebrow, and a black line through the eye. Note the two buffy wingbars and the grayish breast that lacks a central spot.

In winter the solid chestnut cap of the Chipping Sparrow is replaced by a gray and brown striped pattern. The black eyeline remains visible year-round.

American Tree Sparrow

The American Tree Sparrow is slightly larger (6.25 inches or 16 cm long) and often appears more plump than a Chipping Sparrow. American Tree Sparrows look similar in summer and winter, retaining the rust-colored cap year-round. The crown may show a faint gray streak down the middle in winter. The line through the eye is rust-colored like the crown (not black as in the Chipping Sparrow). The bill is noticeably bicolored, with a dark upper bill and a yellowish lower bill. A dark spot is usually visible on the grayish breast, but can sometimes be hidden. The wingbars are generally a brighter white than on the Chipping Sparrow.

KEY FIELD MARKS FOR CHIPPING AND AMERICAN TREE SPARROWS



About the Birds at our Feeders: New research on chickadee vision and hybridization

BY MEGAN WHITMAN, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Research over the last 20 years has shown that birds see other birds very differently than humans do.* Birds have well-developed color-vision, and the structure of their eyes allows them to see a greater variety of colors than humans can see. For example, most birds can see colors in the ultraviolet (UV) spectrum, whereas people cannot without special equipment. Add to that the fact that many birds' plumages reflect UV light, and suddenly the world, from an avian perspective at least, looks very different!

Recent research has demonstrated that 92 percent of bird species in which the sexes appear similar to human observers are in fact different in the eyes of the birds—they can see color differences that are imperceptible to people. To our eyes, for example, male and female Black-capped Chickadees appear identical. In the eyes of a chickadee, however, the black cap and the white cheek patches actually appear different in males and females. In the Tufted Titmouse, differences that are perceptible to the birds are located on the flanks and chest. More than 150 species of birds in North America have plumage differences that are detectable to birds but not to us.

As you watch the chickadees in your area, take a minute to think about what they might be seeing that you're not. Could any of the bird behaviors we observe be attributable to plumage signals invisible to our eyes?

* Eaton, M. D. 2007. Avian visual perspective on plumage coloration confirms rarity of sexually monochromatic North American passerines. *The Auk* 124:155–161.

Funny business in the mountains

Most eastern FeederWatchers know if they have Black-capped or Carolina chickadees at their feeders; those in the North generally have black-capped, and those in the southeast U.S. generally have Carolina. But for participants who live in the overlap zone in the east-central U.S., distinguishing between the two species can be difficult if not impossible. The species appear very similar to one another and, to further confuse things, they're known to hybridize where the species coexist and individuals of one species may learn vocalizations from the other species.

Recent genetic analyses of populations located within the zone of overlap in the Appalachian Mountains revealed an astonishingly high amount of hybridization—more than 50 percent of birds in some areas had mixed black-capped and Carolina ancestry.* Interaction between the two species may be influenced by the mountainous habitat in the Appalachians, where dispersal and socialization may be inhibited by the sharp changes in elevation and habitat. Despite the high degree of genetic mixing, only 20 percent of birds were observed singing atypical songs. What does this mean for the casual observer? Don't always believe what you hear! 🐦

* Sattler, G. D. et al. 2007. An assessment of song admixture as an indicator of hybridization in Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*) and Carolina Chickadee (*P. carolinensis*). *The Auk* 124:926–944.

*Is this chickadee a male or female?
You cannot tell by looking, but the birds can.*

