

Supplement to *Living Bird*

Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2009-10

The **Cornell** Lab  of Ornithology



BIRD STUDIES
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX CANADA



FOCUS ON CITIZEN SCIENCE • VOLUME 6

The days are becoming shorter, the nights cooler, and the birds are settling into their winter territories—a new season of FeederWatch is upon us. As author Edward Kanze wrote, “The good naturalist knows there’s always more to discover—birds that defy the range maps and flit in from afar, birds with unfamiliar plumages, albino birds, partial albinos, birds that belt out songs different from those they’re supposed to sing, and familiar birds that behave in ways that surprise you. Keep your eyes peeled and your ears clear.”* Before looking forward to the new season, let’s take one last look back at the winter of 2009–10.

*Kanze, E. 2006. *Over the Mountain and Home Again: Journeys of an Adirondack Naturalist*, N.K. Burns Publishing.

2009–10 FeederWatch season statistics

15,699 participants
112,590 checklists submitted
5,855,881 birds reported



Fox Sparrow by Gary Mueller.
Cover photo of Northern Cardinal by Alain Beauchamp.

Focus on Citizen Science is a publication highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This issue, *Winter Bird Highlights 2010*, is brought to you by Project FeederWatch, a 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.

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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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Winter of the Long-eared Owls

BY GENNA KNIGHT, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Long-eared Owls are not your typical feeder birds and are even considered endangered in parts of their range. The inconspicuous owls roost in trees and dense vegetation by day and hunt almost exclusively in open habitats at night, making them seldom seen, even in the most populated areas of their breeding and winter range. It is no wonder the FeederWatch database flagged observations from long-time participants Bobbie and John Paskvalich when they reported a rare and remarkable count of *eight Long-eared Owls* in their Naperville, Illinois, count site this past winter. Fortunately, Bobbie and John had plenty of photos to substantiate their unique observation.

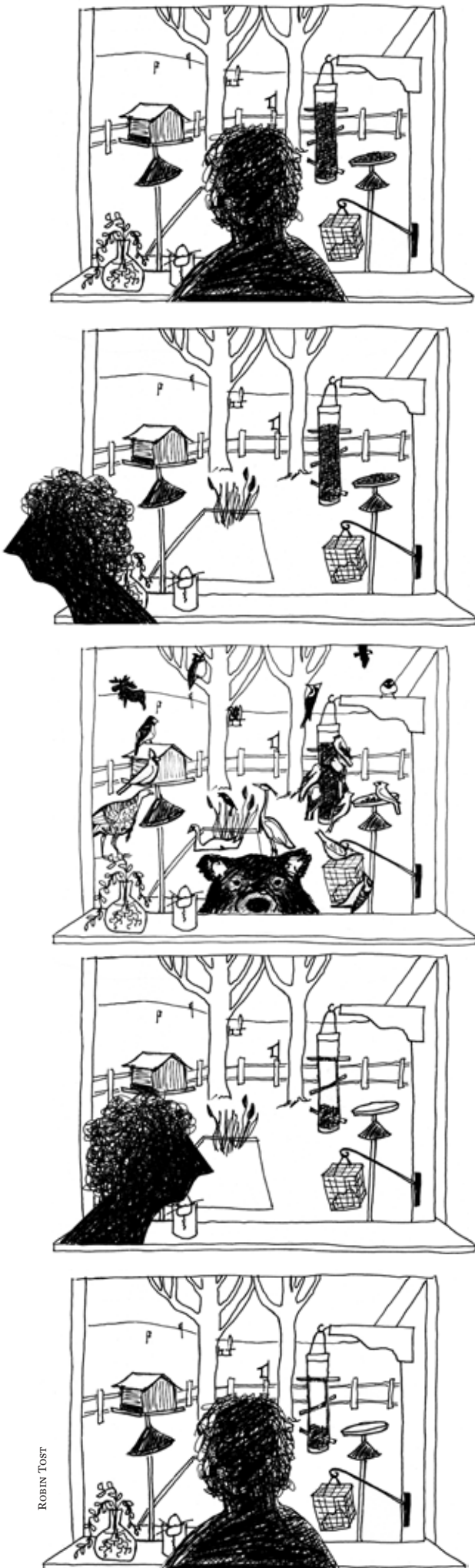
Bobbie refers to the 2009–10 FeederWatch season as “My winter of the owls!” though she and her husband have observed a few of these owls in their backyard since 1999. “We have three tall blue spruce trees where the owls like to roost,” she noted. “It’s almost like they have assigned seats.” According to Bobbie and John, the owls spent their time in the trees from early morning to early evening, sleeping, grooming, or coughing up pellets. They hunted for small mammals at night. Thanks to asymmetrical ear openings, Long-eared Owls have a finely tuned sense of sound that helps them to locate prey in the dark.

Bobbie and John noticed how the sleeping owls were alerted by any action in the backyard during the day. “I liked to observe their behavior when they would stand up tall and flatten their wings against their body to resemble a post or tree trunk,” Bobbie wrote. “I was lucky enough some nights to see them fly from the trees to go out hunting,” Bobbie reported. “It has been a real treat to observe these birds.”

Above: Long-eared Owl at Bobbie and John Paskvalich’s FeederWatch site in Naperville, Illinois. **Left:** FeederWatcher and cartoonist Robin Tost of Mill River, Massachusetts, has been FeederWatching since 1989 and shares a humorous look at what must be happening when we are *not* watching our feeders.



BOBBIE & JOHN PASKVALICH



ROBIN TOST



EURASIAN SISKIN BY MICHAEL BUTLER

Eurasian Siskin—the next invader?

It took Michael and Martha Butler several field guides to identify the unusual bird at their feeders as a Eurasian Siskin. This bird stayed at the feeders in Marathon, Ontario, during April 12–22, 2010, visiting with a flock of closely related Pine Siskins. As the name implies, the Eurasian Siskin is native to Europe and Asia, but these siskins and other foreign birds have been showing up at feeders across North America for the past few decades. Many of these birds are escaped pets.

Several introduced species have successfully adapted to life in North America, established self-sustaining populations, and eventually spread across the continent. The House Sparrow, European Starling, and Rock Pigeon are classic examples of species that have successfully invaded North America (and other continents as well). We are currently witnessing the invasion of North America by Eurasian Collared-Doves (see map on page 10). Are there other introduced species that have the invasive potential of species like the starling, pigeon, and collared-dove?

Caged birds that escape from captivity, like the European Goldfinches and Eurasian Siskins that are occasionally seen by FeederWatchers, are unlikely to establish viable populations in the wild. If enough individuals are released in an area, however, establishment is possible. Viable wild populations of Nutmeg Mannikins can now be found in Southern California, numerous species of parrots are established in areas across the U.S., and most of the Eurasian Collared-Doves now spreading from coast to coast are descendants of fewer than 100 birds that were released in the Bahamas. By keeping an eye on your feeders, you could help document the start of the next invasion!

Which species is it?

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON,
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks commonly prey on feeder birds and are frequently reported by FeederWatchers. Although often observed around bird feeders, these hawks present a significant identification challenge.

The Cooper's Hawk is larger on average, but small Cooper's Hawks are roughly the same size as large Sharp-shinned Hawks, and the species look similar in both adult and juvenile plumages. Observation of multiple field marks is likely required to distinguish one species from the other.

Cooper's Hawk (Accipiter cooperii)

- Similar in size to a crow (14–20" long)
- Tip of the tail is rounded with the longest tail feathers in the middle
- Head appears large compared with body; bird typically appears tall
- Thick, tubular body with a lower center of gravity
- Thicker, shorter-looking legs compared with Sharp-shinned Hawk
- The feathers on the back of the head are often raised, giving the bird a crested appearance
- The large, angular head projects far beyond the wings when soaring, giving the bird a cross-like shape in flight

Sharp-shinned Hawk (Accipiter striatus)

- Similar in size to a jay or dove (10–14" long)
- Tip of tail is square, showing prominent corners
- Head appears small compared with body; bird typically looks short-necked
- Broad chest and narrow hips, high center of gravity
- Thinner, pencil-like legs that look long when compared with the Cooper's Hawk
- When the bird is soaring, short rounded wings are pushed forward at the wrists so that the small head barely extends beyond the wings

Age-related field marks

Adult Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks have dark gray backs, horizontal rusty barring on the breast, and

orange-red eyes. Juveniles have yellow eyes, dark vertical stripes on their breasts, and variable brown backs and heads with some white spots. These hawks gradually molt into adult plumage after their first year.

- **In juvenile birds:** The streaks on the breast of a juvenile Cooper's Hawk are thinner and darker than those on a Sharp-shinned Hawk.
- **In adult birds:** The feathers on the crown of an adult Cooper's Hawk are darker than the feathers on the back of the neck, giving the bird a "capped" appearance. For the adult Sharp-shinned Hawk, on the other hand, the feathers on both the crown and the back of the neck are dark, giving the bird a "hooded" appearance.

Other confusing raptors

Participants often send photos of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks that they believe are falcons. It is actually quite rare to host a falcon like a Merlin, Peregrine, or Prairie Falcon at your feeders. Most of the birds that give the impression of a falcon are actually Cooper's or Sharp-shinned hawks. 📌

Additional field marks, identification tips, and photos of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks, as well as other hard-to-identify species, can be found in the Tricky Bird ID section of our website: www.feederwatch.org/AboutBirdsandFeeding/TrickyBird_IDS.htm.



DAVID SMITH

Juvenile Cooper's Hawk



DAVID SMITH

Juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk

Above: Juveniles of both species have brown stripes running vertically down a white breast. Note that the stripes on the juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk are bolder. **Below:** The barring on the adults is reddish-brown and horizontal across the breast. On both juveniles and adults, note that the outer tail feathers on the Cooper's Hawk are shorter than the inner tail feathers, giving a more rounded appearance. The tail feathers of the Sharp-shinned Hawk, in contrast, are all roughly the same length, giving a squared-off appearance to the end of the tail.

Adult Cooper's Hawk



LINDA WILLIAMS

Adult Sharp-shinned Hawk



LORI GLADUICH

Woodpeckers on the rise at feeders in Canada

BY KERRIE WILCOX, BIRD STUDIES CANADA

This past winter, many Canadian participants were disappointed by the low level of activity at feeders. In fact, FeederWatch data show lower numbers of many species following an excellent season the previous winter. Woodpeckers, however, were a bright spot as the percentage of locations reporting five species across Canada reached record or near-record levels last season.

Downy Woodpeckers were reported by 82% of all FeederWatchers in Canada in 2009–10, up from 65% of locations when FeederWatch began more than 20 years ago. Likewise, Hairy Woodpeckers were reported at 64% of feeders this past season, up from 49% in the first year of FeederWatch. Quebecers reported the highest percentage of feeders visited by Hairy Woodpeckers, at 77%.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker's range has been creeping northward from the eastern United States over the last decade, with most of the range expansion taking place in Ontario. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas showed a dramatic 250% increase for this species between the first Atlas completed in 1981 and the second Atlas completed in 2005. The Atlas suggests that the maturation of forests in northeastern North America, the increasing popularity of backyard bird feeders, and milder winters are all likely factors contributing to this woodpecker's northward expansion. Red-bellied Woodpeckers were recorded at 20% of feeders in Ontario this past season (up from only 3.4% 20 years ago). FeederWatch data suggest that the range may be expanding westward as well, with two confirmed sightings in Winnipeg this past winter.

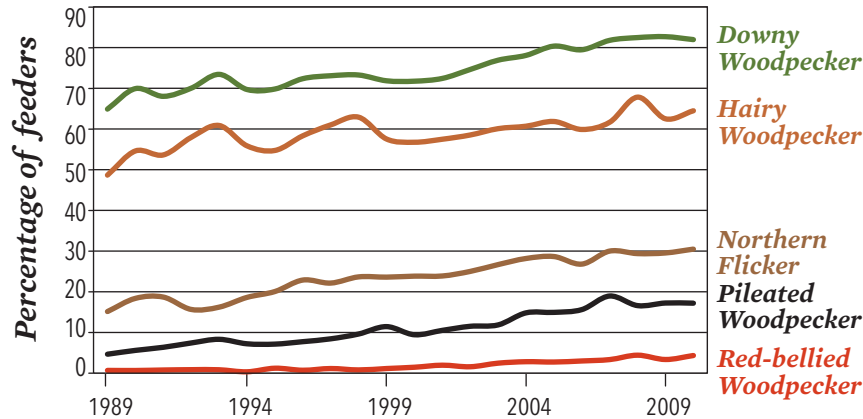
Pileated Woodpeckers are visiting more and more feeders each year, from only 5% of locations in 1989 to 17% during this past season. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas also found that Pileated Woodpeckers appear to be steadily recovering from historical declines caused by habitat loss and hunting.

Despite having a winter diet mainly of fruit (poison ivy and poison sumac berries are favorites), Northern Flickers visited 30% of Canadian FeederWatch locations at least once over the course of the winter. Although more FeederWatchers might be offering suet to attract woodpeckers (possibly biasing FeederWatch results), trends from FeederWatch tend to match those from the Breeding Bird Survey, which suggests



PILEATED WOODPECKER BY TERRY FINLAY

Percentage of Canadian FeederWatch locations reporting woodpeckers



Graph: Long-term trends show that woodpeckers are on the rise across Canada, according to FeederWatch reports.

that FeederWatch data are likely revealing real population trends.

Cool facts about woodpeckers

Woodpeckers are anatomically interesting in a number of ways that set them apart from our other feeder birds. Most woodpeckers have zygodactyl feet—meaning they have two toes in front and two in back. This allows for a tighter grip on vertical bark surfaces and feeders. The stiff-feathered tail is also unique and is used as a brace during tree climbing or feeding. The

brace allows the woodpecker to lean back and throw its entire body into each peck. The tongue is unusual as well. The Red-bellied Woodpecker, for example, has a tongue that is three times the length of its bill. The roots of the retracted tongue curve under and up the back of the skull. The tongue tip is hard and sharply pointed, allowing it to skewer larvae and insects. Tiny, rear-facing barbs hold the food in place while the tongue is retracted into the mouth.

How to attract woodpeckers

Attracting woodpeckers to your feeders is fairly easy—simply offer suet! There are lots of suet feeders available commercially, including cages for suet cakes, and log feeders that have large holes for packing with suet. Woodpeckers also eat a variety of seeds and especially enjoy peanut pieces and other nuts and dried fruit. Some FeederWatchers simply spread peanut butter on trees, attracting woodpeckers and other feeder birds.

In order to maintain attractive woodpecker habitat, consider preserving dead trees in your yard. Dead trees offer perfect perching and nesting opportunities. If a dead tree poses no danger to life or property, leave it standing for the woodpeckers.

NORTHERN FLICKER BY NICK SAUNDERS



“Putting up a suet feeder in my count site has been really fantastic. Now I have regular visits from chickadees, both Red-breasted and White-breasted nuthatches, and, for the first time, Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied woodpeckers. Who knew these guys would be here, so far into the city?”

Michael Hayes, Burlington, Ontario

Regional round-up

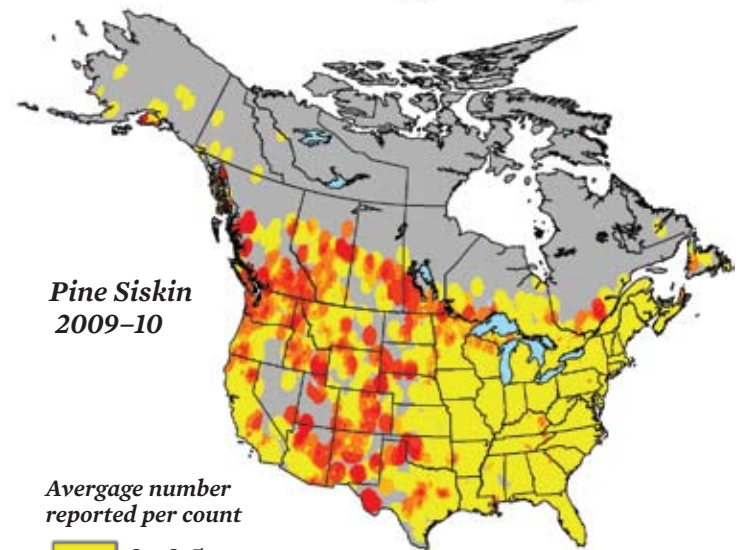
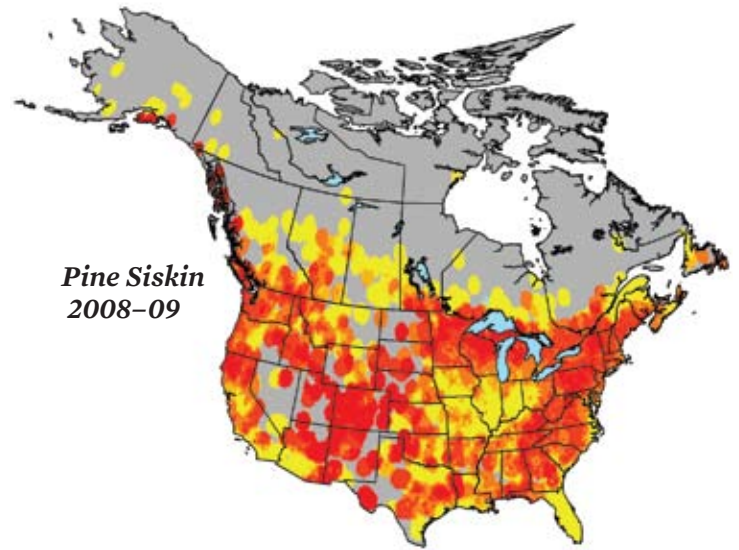
Trends and highlights from the 2009–10 FeederWatch season

BY DAVID BONTER,
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

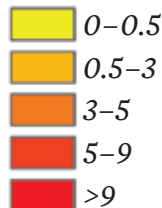
FeederWatchers reported 5,855,881 birds this past season—a staggering number, but reports actually lagged behind previous seasons.

On average, participants reported 52 birds per count in 2009–10, down from 59 per count in 2008–09. A big reason for the decline was the general lack of irruptive species like Pine Siskins, Common Redpolls, and Pine Grosbeaks moving south of the U.S.–Canada border. Food supplies in the boreal forests of Canada must have been excellent in order to hold millions of these finches north of the border for the entire winter.

The regional summaries found on the following pages group states and provinces that share similar feeder-bird communities. The Top-25 lists are based on the percentage of FeederWatch locations in a region that hosted each species at least once between November 2009 and April 2010. The tables also include the average ranking for each species over the history of FeederWatch. For more detailed information, including Top-25 lists from individual states and provinces and additional rare bird reports and photos, please visit the Explore Data section of the FeederWatch website.



Average number reported per count



Maps: The difference between the last two winters in the distribution and abundance of Pine Siskins at feeders, particularly in eastern North America, was striking. Data are lacking for areas in gray.

Where did the Pine Siskins that moved into the southern and eastern states in 2008–09 go in 2009–10? See detailed movements of banded birds online at www.feederwatch.org/News/siskins

PAM KOCH



Photo: Western Bluebirds enjoy mealworms provided by FeederWatcher Pam Koch in Flagstaff, Arizona. Bluebirds were reported by 15% of FeederWatchers in the Southwest region last winter.

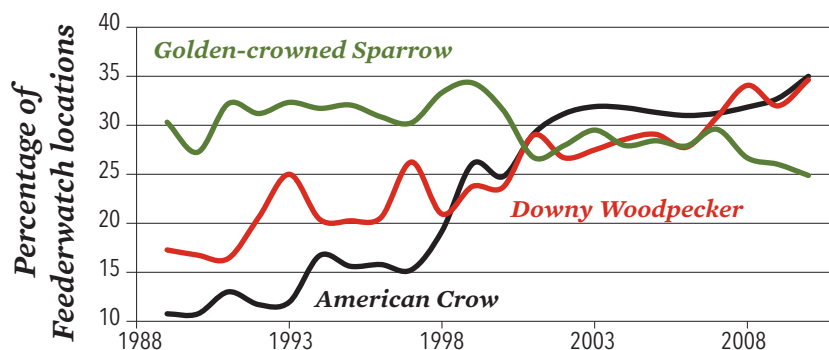


Southwest & California Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 820 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2009-10	Average		2009-10	Average
1	1	House Finch	92	89
2	2	Dark-eyed Junco	79	81
3	4	Mourning Dove	70	63
4	4	Western Scrub-Jay	60	62
5	5	White-crowned Sparrow	60	59
6	8	American Robin	60	53
7	20	Lesser Goldfinch	58	34
8	6	House Sparrow	56	59
9	10	American Goldfinch	54	48
10	9	Northern Flicker	54	48
11	10	Anna's Hummingbird	50	49
12	12	Spotted Towhee	41	40
13	15	European Starling	35	33
14	27	American Crow	35	23
15	23	Downy Woodpecker	35	25
16	18	White-breasted Nuthatch	34	29
17	14	California Towhee	33	35
18	19	"Plain" Titmouse*	33	29
19	12	Pine Siskin	31	42
20	29	Cooper's Hawk	31	21
21	21	Sharp-shinned Hawk	28	27
22	30	Bushtit	28	21
23	17	Steller's Jay	27	32
24	26	Black-capped Chickadee	27	23
25	25	Yellow-rumped Warbler	26	24

* "Plain" Titmouse includes Oak Titmouse and Juniper Titmouse.



Graph: FeederWatch trends in the percentage of sites hosting Golden-crowned Sparrow (green), Downy Woodpecker (red), and American Crow (black) over time. **Photo:** House Finches are seen by more participants in the region than any other species.

The winter of 2009-10 was a good one for finding American Crows, Downy Woodpeckers, and Black-capped Chickadees at feeders in the region, as all three of these species were recorded at more FeederWatch locations than at any point since the project began in 1987. White-breasted Nuthatches were reported by one-third of participants in the region, the second-best year on record for that species. Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to spread and finished just out of the Top 25 with one in four locations reporting this non-native species. Lesser Goldfinch also continues to become more common, with average flock sizes increasing to 6.6 birds (1987-2010 average = 4.6 birds).

On the downside, Golden-crowned Sparrow reports were the lowest on record (25% of sites) with flock sizes averaging only 3.6 birds (long-term average = 4.4). As expected, Pine Siskin reports dropped by 20% from the near-record highs of 2008-09. Results were mixed among the closely-related finches in the genus *Carpodacus*, with few reports of Cassin's Finch or Purple Finch (both reported at fewer than 15% of sites), while the House Finch remained the most common feeder bird in the region.

Notable rare bird reports included a Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Sebastopol, California, a Hooded Oriole in Hilmar, California, and a hotspot of rare bird activity in Caliente, Nevada, where Sue Rogers hosted two out-of-range birds, a White-throated Sparrow and a Red-breasted Sapsucker.



BURNEY HUFF

Common Grackles were not as abundant as usual in the South last winter, as reports of this blackbird dropped to the lowest level in the history of FeederWatch. Average flock sizes were lower than expected as well, with only 4.7 birds reported (long-term average = 6.0). Reports of other blackbirds, including Brown-headed Cowbird and Red-winged Blackbird, were similar to previous years.

Chipping Sparrows were reported by more participants than ever before, with an average flock size of 7.3 birds. It was also a banner season for Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers as reports of these species approached record highs.

Many of the Pine Siskins that visited nearly half of all FeederWatch locations in the region in 2008–09 did not return last winter. Siskins were seen at 18% of locations in 2009–10, dropping from #16 on the common feeder bird list to #39 last season. Purple Finches were also seen at fewer sites last winter, while House Finch and American Goldfinch numbers remained strong.

In research news, project staff analyzed FeederWatch data on Eurasian Collared-Doves in Florida for an article published in the scientific journal *Ecography* entitled, “Invasive birds in a novel landscape: habitat associations and effects on established species.” This non-native dove continues to spread from the Southeast to the rest of North America (see map below).

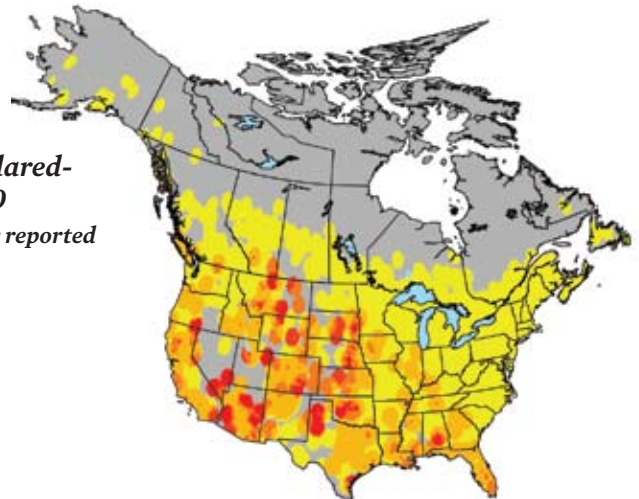
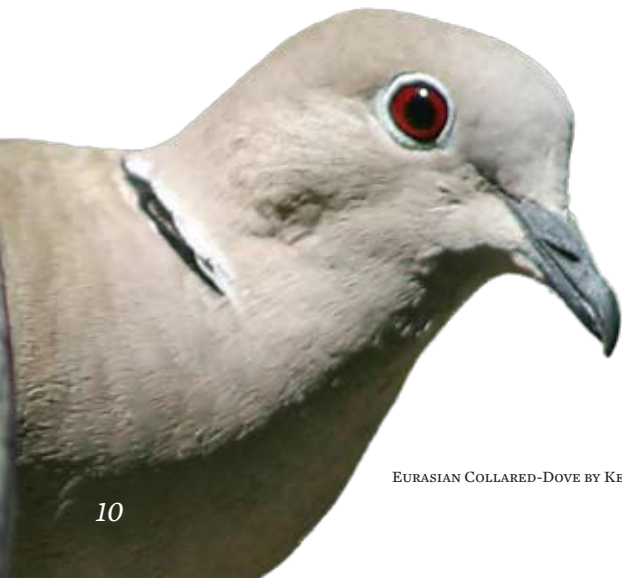
Southeast & South-Central Regions



TOP-25 LIST: 1,170 SITES REPORTING

Rank	2009–10	Average	Species	Percentage of Sites	
				2009–10	Average
1	1	1	Northern Cardinal	96	97
2	2	2	Mourning Dove	90	90
3	4	4	Carolina Chickadee	86	84
4	4	4	American Goldfinch	84	83
5	5	5	Blue Jay	81	83
6	7	7	Tufted Titmouse	79	75
7	8	8	Carolina Wren	79	74
8	6	6	Red-bellied Woodpecker	76	79
9	11	11	House Finch	73	65
10	13	13	American Robin	69	59
11	12	12	Downy Woodpecker	67	61
12	12	12	Northern Mockingbird	67	60
13	10	10	Dark-eyed Junco	62	66
14	13	13	White-throated Sparrow	52	55
15	19	19	Chipping Sparrow	51	43
16	23	23	Yellow-rumped Warbler	48	37
17	25	25	Eastern Bluebird	46	33
18	18	18	Brown-headed Cowbird	44	44
19	22	22	American Crow	44	37
20	22	22	White-breasted Nuthatch	44	38
21	20	20	Red-winged Blackbird	42	42
22	15	15	Common Grackle	40	50
23	20	20	“Rufous-sided” Towhee*	40	40
24	30	30	Pine Warbler	37	27
25	22	22	Brown Thrasher	37	38

* Combines Eastern Towhee and Spotted Towhee

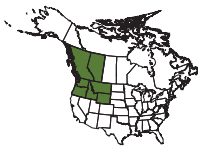


Eurasian Collared-Dove 2009–10

Average number reported per count



EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE BY KEVIN CARVER



Pacific Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 941 SITES REPORTING

Rank	2009–10		Percentage of Sites	
	Rank	Average Species	2009–10	Average
1	1	Dark-eyed Junco	90	88
2	2	Black-capped Chickadee	79	80
3	5	Northern Flicker	77	66
4	4	House Finch	74	71
5	7	American Robin	68	59
6	9	Red-breasted Nuthatch	64	55
7	10	Downy Woodpecker	63	53
8	6	Pine Siskin	62	63
9	9	Spotted Towhee	54	54
10	9	Song Sparrow	54	54
11	11	European Starling	50	51
12	11	House Sparrow	48	52
13	11	Steller's Jay	47	52
14	17	American Goldfinch	44	34
15	15	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	40	41
16	19	American Crow	35	30
17	18	Hairy Woodpecker	33	30
18	38	Anna's Hummingbird	31	14
19	27	Bushtit	30	21
20	21	Fox Sparrow	29	27
21	28	Mourning Dove	27	19
22	15	Varied Thrush	26	40
23	20	Red-winged Blackbird	26	27
24	22	Purple Finch	25	26
25	25	Black-billed Magpie	24	22

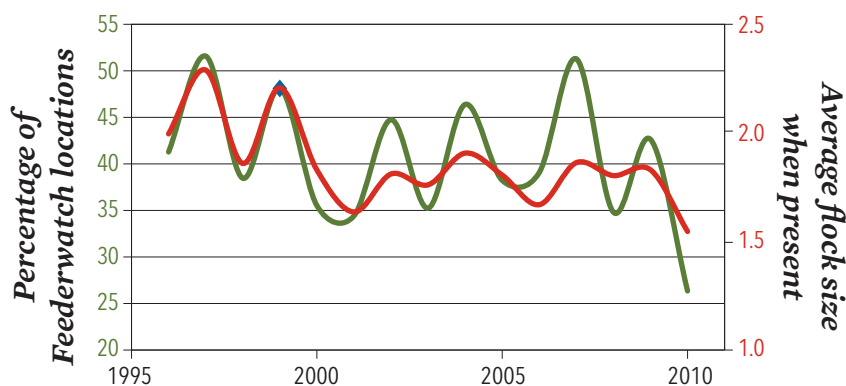
The energetic Bushtit visited more FeederWatch locations last winter than at any point in project history, breaking into the regional Top 20 for the first time. Reports of American Goldfinches and Anna's Hummingbirds also reached record highs for the region.

Unlike most other areas across North America, Pine Siskins were relatively easy to find in the region last winter, being seen at just below the long-term average of 63% of locations.

Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to spread into the northwestern states and western provinces. This species was reported at only 2% of locations as recently as 2007 but was seen at 8% of sites last winter (see map on previous page).

A Brambling made an unexpected appearance at a FeederWatch site in Bella Coola, British Columbia. Individuals of this Eurasian species of finch occasionally stray into Alaska and western North America in winter. Also unexpected were vagrant Harris's Sparrows in Enterprise, Oregon, and Missoula, Montana. This species typically winters in the Great Plains from South Dakota to Texas. Two Gray Catbirds lingered much later into winter than expected in Sisters, Oregon, and Newcastle, Wyoming.

An analysis of FeederWatch data in the 1990s documented a biennial, cyclic pattern in Varied Thrush abundance that continues today (see graph). Following the pattern, 2009–10 was expected to be a relatively poor year, but Varied Thrush was seen at fewer FeederWatch locations in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain regions in 2009–10 than in any season during the past 15 years, with the smallest average flock size (1.6 birds) in FeederWatch history.



Graph: Trends in the proportion of locations hosting Varied Thrush (green line) and the average flock size when the species is reported on a count (red line).



VARIED THRUSH
BY JOHN TUBBS

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



A few hardy Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were recorded by FeederWatchers in Maine, New York, Ontario, Wisconsin, and Vermont—farther north than usually seen in winter.

CHRISTOPHER KEEN

Many FeederWatchers in northeastern North America expressed exasperation last winter, sensing that something was missing from their feeders. FeederWatch data reveal that the near complete lack of irruptive winter finches and lower flock sizes for some of the most common feeder birds combined to bring fewer birds to feeders. The unprecedented Pine Siskin irruption of 2008–09 (60% of sites reporting this finch) was followed by a sub-par season for siskins last winter (11% of sites). Where present, siskin flocks were the smallest in FeederWatch history at 2.5 birds (long-term average = 4.8). Common Redpolls were nearly nonexistent, seen at only 3% of locations in 2009–10 compared

TOP-25 LIST: 6,018 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2009–10	Average		2009–10	Average
1	1	Chickadee*	97	96
2	3	Dark-eyed Junco	92	90
3	2	Mourning Dove	92	92
4	5	Downy Woodpecker	91	87
5	4	Blue Jay	89	90
6	7	American Goldfinch	89	84
7	6	Northern Cardinal	86	84
8	8	White-breasted Nuthatch	83	77
9	9	House Finch	70	76
10	11	Tufted Titmouse	66	63
11	10	European Starling	64	68
12	17	American Robin	63	48
13	15	Hairy Woodpecker	63	53
14	17	Red-bellied Woodpecker	61	49
15	12	House Sparrow	60	64
16	16	American Crow	57	52
17	15	Common Grackle	52	52
18	17	Song Sparrow	50	47
19	20	Red-winged Blackbird	44	42
20	20	White-throated Sparrow	44	42
21	23	Carolina Wren	40	32
22	22	American Tree Sparrow	38	37
23	22	Brown-headed Cowbird	38	35
24	23	Red-breasted Nuthatch	33	33
25	22	Purple Finch	33	36

* Combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee.

with 30% of sites during the previous season.

Meanwhile, average flock sizes for 8 of the region's Top 10 species were below long-term averages. The decrease was especially noticeable in House Finches, where the average flock size of 3.7 birds was the lowest on record. Evening Grosbeaks were seen at only 4% of sites, also the lowest on record, and even reports of the often-unappreciated House Sparrows dropped to all-time lows.

On the upside, a few species were seen at or near record levels, including Northern Flicker (25% of sites), Chipping Sparrow (17%), and Eastern Bluebird (15%). Joan Medina in St. Catherines, Ontario, reported a Eurasian Collared-Dove at her feeders, perhaps a sign of the impending invasion of the Northeast as this species continues to expand its range.



North-Central & Mid-Central Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 667 SITES REPORTING

Rank	2009–10		Percentage of Sites	
	Average	Species	2009–10	Average
1	3	Downy Woodpecker	92	89
2	1	Chickadee*	91	94
3	3	Dark-eyed Junco	91	90
4	3	Blue Jay	88	88
5	6	American Goldfinch	83	77
6	7	White-breasted Nuthatch	78	74
7	8	Northern Cardinal	71	71
8	10	Hairy Woodpecker	69	63
9	6	House Sparrow	69	77
10	11	House Finch	68	62
11	13	American Robin	65	53
12	12	Red-bellied Woodpecker	61	55
13	14	Mourning Dove	60	52
14	11	European Starling	56	60
15	16	American Crow	42	44
16	17	Purple Finch	42	40
17	19	Northern Flicker	40	36
18	16	Common Grackle	39	44
19	21	Red-winged Blackbird	34	30
20	21	Red-breasted Nuthatch	33	32
21	22	American Tree Sparrow	31	28
22	21	Tufted Titmouse	30	30
23	28	Pileated Woodpecker	27	17
24	27	Carolina Wren	27	19
25	24	White-throated Sparrow	26	24

* Combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee

Following the massive movements of winter finches into the region during the winter of 2008–09, last winter saw a relative paucity of finches in much of the region. At the 26% of sites that did host siskins in 2009–10, flock sizes were, on average, 30% lower than in the previous season. Given the typically biennial pattern in southward movements of redpolls and siskins, keep an eye out for their return during the coming winter.

Numbers of the resident and partially-migratory House Finches were also down last winter, dropping to the lowest point since 1991 with an average flock size of only 3.6 birds (22 year average = 4.6).

Unlike the finches, woodpeckers had a good year in the region, with Downy Woodpeckers topping the charts for the fourth consecutive year. Pileated Woodpeckers appeared at 27% of count sites and moved into the regional Top 25, the second best year for this species in FeederWatch history. Two pioneering Red-bellied Woodpeckers were seen in Winnipeg, Manitoba, as this species continues to push the northern limits of its range.

Unexpectedly late observations were recorded of a Hermit Thrush in Bellevue, Nebraska, a Gray Catbird in Lino Lakes, Minnesota, and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Roseville, Minnesota.

Rustic Bunting: A FeederWatch First!

The Rustic Bunting, a Eurasian species, very rarely wanders into North America in winter. Those that do appear on the continent are almost exclusively seen along the West Coast. Their normal breeding range extends from Scandinavia to northern Siberia, and they typically winter in China or Japan. Prior to this year, no FeederWatch participant had ever reported seeing a Rustic Bunting at their feeders. Last winter, however, three individual birds were confirmed at FeederWatch locations—one in Saskatchewan (photo at right) and two in the same yard in Alaska! Further details and photos can be found online on the Rare Bird pages in the Explore Data section at www.feederwatch.org.



HARVEY SCHMIDT

Alaska & Northern Canada



Fewer finches than normal left the boreal forest to visit bird feeders in Alaska and Northern Canada last winter. Redpolls were reported at 20% fewer locations last winter than in 2008–09, dropping from the top spot on the regional list following a three-year run at #1. Typically ranked in the Top 5, Pine Grosbeaks were also relatively scarce last winter and fell to #10, with less than a third of FeederWatchers hosting this species. Pine Siskins showed one of the poorest seasons on record with only 16% of sites reporting siskins.

Despite the decrease in feeder bird activity reported by most participants in the region, a few notable reports came in from Alaska. Eurasian Collared-Doves arrived at FeederWatch sites in the state in 2009, with reports from Ketchikan and Ward Cove. The pair of Rustic Buntings in Ketchikan was a highlight (see page 13). An out-of-range White-throated Sparrow appeared in Seward, and a lingering Lincoln’s Sparrow was recorded in Homer.

Special thanks to our two FeederWatchers reporting from Hawaii last winter. Observations of two introduced species with exotic names were submitted to the FeederWatch database for the first time by Peter Donaldson of Pearl City, Hawaii: Red-billed Leiothrix (a babbler from South Asia) and White-rumped Shama (a flycatcher from South and Southeast Asia).

TOP-10 LIST: 51 SITES REPORTING

Rank			Percentage of Sites	
2009-10	Average	Species	2009-10	Average
1	1	Black-capped Chickadee	82	83
2	2	Common Redpoll	69	79
3	5	Boreal Chickadee	55	57
4	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	53	50
5	6	Downy Woodpecker	53	52
6	5	Black-billed Magpie	51	55
7	8	Hairy Woodpecker	49	49
8	9	Dark-eyed Junco	41	43
9	11	Common Raven	41	36
10	5	Pine Grosbeak	31	59

Project FeederWatch relies on the generosity of our participants who not only share knowledge about the birds but also fund the program. Last year, we received more than U.S.\$50,000 in charitable gifts despite the global economic uncertainties. Your tax-deductible gift supports our research and helps keep participation fees low. Please consider making a special gift to FeederWatch and including FeederWatch, the Cornell Lab, or Bird Studies Canada in your estate giving plans.

For more information, please visit

U.S.: www.birds.cornell.edu/plannedgifts

or www.birds.cornell.edu/donate and

choose FeederWatch in the left column.

Canada: www.bsc-eoc.org and click on Support BSC.

Thank you for your continued support!



EASTERN BLUEBIRD BY GLENDA SIMMONS

Biology teacher turns his students' focus outside through FeederWatch

BY GENNA KNIGHT, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

MARK JAWORSKI

Biology teacher Mark Jaworski subscribes to the concept that “no child should be left inside.” This past FeederWatch season, 87 of Mr. Jaworski’s 9th graders at Lorain County Early College High School in Elyria, Ohio, ventured from behind their desks to study life in flight beyond their classroom windows by participating in Project FeederWatch.

Students in the Early College High School program have the unique opportunity to participate in a combined high school and college experience on the Lorain County Community College campus with the goal of simultaneously earning a high school diploma and college associate’s degree. All students participating in the program are first generation college students. Mr. Jaworski has made it his goal to go beyond the classroom to teach his students about the natural world, which he believes should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives.

In preparation for the FeederWatch project, Mr. Jaworski required each of his students to research a bird of their choice. Students were asked to prepare a PowerPoint presentation that included the common name, genus, and species of the bird, a recording of its voice, as well as a detailed description of the bird’s physical features. Presentations also included habitat descriptions, photos of eggs, information about nesting habits, range maps, and other interesting facts about the birds. By the time the FeederWatch season started, Mr. Jaworski and his class had become familiar with 87 bird species—each researched by a student in the class.

The students created a count site outside of their classroom window that included five bird feeders, one suet cage, and water. Groups of four students observed the feeders for two to four hours at a time during their count days and reported their observations back to their teacher. To his delight, students began to share photos and stories with Mr. Jaworski about birds they spotted outside of school.

“They got outside!” he wrote. “As a teacher, it was gratifying for me to observe the excitement of my students based on the birds they identified.”

Student Alexe Urban wrote, “Before Project FeederWatch, the only things I knew about birds, for the most part, were that they had beaks, feath-



Students at the Early College High School in Ohio maintain their FeederWatch count site as part of teacher Mark Jaworski’s “no child should be left inside” initiative.

ers, wings, and that they could chirp. During the course of this project I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge about birds. I really never cared much about the birds around me. Once we started this project I noticed so many more birds and had so much fun counting, observing, identifying, hypothesizing, and inferring. I loved this project.”

Mr. Jaworski plans to collaborate with his students’ 10th grade science teacher to help the new sophomores analyze and draw conclusions about the data they collected for Project FeederWatch as freshmen. “I look forward to analyzing the data with my students this fall,” wrote Mr. Jaworski. As the project grows, he hopes to have these students mentor the incoming 9th graders—helping them to identify birds, analyze data, and draw conclusions about their observations. In addition to participating in Project FeederWatch for the 2010–11 season, Mr. Jaworski’s new 9th grade class will build, erect, and monitor 30 bluebird nest boxes on the college campus, a project made possible by a Community Colleges Broadening Horizons Through Service Learning Grant.

Thanks to Mr. Jaworski, incoming students in the Early College High School program will experience the natural world, enhance their academic studies, and they will not be left inside.

Recent research about the birds at our feeders

BY DAVID BONTER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Transmitters reveal detailed feeding behavior

Have you ever wondered how many individual birds visit your feeders? Is it the same individuals, or are many different birds coming to feed throughout the day? How is feeding behavior related to weather conditions? How many seeds *can* a chickadee eat per day, anyway?

FeederWatch staff are excited to report that a new research project is focusing on these questions and others about the feeding behaviors of wild birds. Last winter, Lab researchers and Cornell University students attached passive integrated transponder tags to the leg bands of 129 Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Tufted Titmice, and House Finches. Each lightweight tag (weighing less than 0.1 gram) transmits a unique identification number that is read by special bird feeders equipped with an antenna, battery, and circuit board. The feeders are placed in wooded areas around the Cornell campus, and record the exact time and date of each visit by a tagged bird. More than 600,000 visits were logged by the 129 birds between November 2009 and April 2010!

Initial results from the pilot season show that individual birds may take up to 200 black-oil sunflower seeds per day. Many of these seeds were certainly stored (cached) for later consumption. Most chickadees tended to be faithful to one or two feeding stations located within 100 m (109 yards) of one another, but several birds abandoned one feeder site and moved as far as 1 km (0.6 mi) to another feeding location.

We are currently expanding the project, building

additional “wired” feeders, and tagging more birds. Research will focus on the influence of weather and forest fragmentation on feeding and caching behavior and overwinter survival. In addition, students will study the influence of disease on House Finch movements. To learn more or to help support this research, visit www.feederwatch.org/RFID.

Hummingbirds wintering in Southeast

Hummingbirds from west of the Rocky Mountains traditionally wintered in Central America, but are now frequently reported wintering in the southeastern United States. Little research, however, has been conducted on which hummingbirds are wintering in the Southeast and if these pioneering birds are successful. Is the southeastern United States a viable wintering location? Do individual hummingbirds survive and return to these wintering sites?

Hummingbird banders Fred Basset and Doreen Cubie began capturing and marking the wayward hummingbirds in southern Alabama and northern Florida in 1998 in order to answer these questions. Over a 10-year period, they banded 1,598 individuals of 10 species including rufous (52%), ruby-throated (24%), black-chinned (17%), buff-bellied (3%), and small numbers of calliope, Allen’s, broad-tailed, broad-billed, Anna’s, and Costa’s hummingbirds. Males and females, juveniles and adults were all captured. The researchers discovered that many birds were successfully overwintering, as 144 birds of 5 species returned to the same wintering location and were recaptured at least one year following the initial capture. The researchers concluded that more species and individuals are wintering in the region than previously thought, and that Alabama and Florida are viable overwintering areas.

If you are hosting an out-of-range hummingbird at your feeders, be sure to report it to FeederWatch. To contact a licensed hummingbird bander, visit www.hummingbirdsplus.org.

Source: Basset, F. and D. Cubie. 2009. Wintering hummingbirds in Alabama and Florida: species diversity, sex and age ratios, and site fidelity. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 80:154–162.

Photos: Cornell graduate student Jonathan DeCoste attaches a transmitter to a House Finch in order to study the influence of disease (Mycoplasmal conjunctivitis) on movement patterns. Inset: A tagged Black-capped Chickadee perches on an antenna attached to a special feeder equipped to read the transmitter.

SUSAN SPEAR (2)

