


# Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2012-13

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology



**U**npredictability is one constant as each winter brings surprises to our feeders. The 2012–13 season broke many regional records with siskins and nuthatches moving south in record numbers to tantalize FeederWatchers across much of the continent. This remarkable year also brought a record-breaking number of FeederWatchers, with more than 20,000 participants in the US and Canada combined!

Whether you've been FeederWatching for 26 years or this is your first season counting, the usual suspects—chickadees, juncos, and woodpeckers—always bring familiarity and enjoyment, as well as valuable data, even if you don't observe anything unusual. Whichever birds arrive at your feeder, we hope they will bring a sense of wonder that captures your attention. Thanks for sharing your observations and insights with us and, most importantly, Happy FeederWatching. 



Bushtit by Scott Clarke.  
Cover photo of finches  
by Pam Garcia.

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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.

#### ***United States***

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# Notes from a Project FeederWatch newbie

BY SUSAN WIDER

**E**nough already. I wasted the entire 2011–12 Project FeederWatch season and never signed up. This year I would enroll.

I still didn't get to it as early as I had planned, but by January I had phoned, paid, and received my packet of materials. And then it sat on the kitchen counter. When I did open the envelope, everything inside looked quite official. There was a tally sheet, an instructional handbook, a calendar, a newsletter, and a lovely fold-out poster to help with bird identification. And then there was the data booklet, which looked so much like a standardized exam staring me in the face that I put everything right back in the envelope. I did consider trying to sketch—as a drawing exercise—Larry McQueen's terrific Blue Jay printed on the outside of the envelope, but I wimped out on that as well, and the envelope was soon buried under the evil pile of ignored mail.

It was my husband who nudged me into action through guilt and honesty, which usually works. He reminded me that, a) I had paid a fee—although quite modest at \$12—to participate, b) I loved a chance at citizen science, and c) an idea for one of my children's nature stories was likely to emerge from the experience. After that I did my homework. The materials are well thought through, I learned a lot, and I quickly realized that this was not onerous in the least. I was eager to begin.

On my first day of counting I reviewed the actual forms to be sure I knew what to track. Then I wrote down my start time, took my tally sheet, cup of tea, and binoculars to the big window I had selected for observing our feeders and settled in. Right away, I discovered that there is a huge difference between bird watching and bird counting. I was accustomed to the kind of birding that mostly involved saying, "Oh there's a robin," or "That's a chickadee over there," or "I see a hawk." This was different. I had to be sure of my bird species on a micro level, sometimes using binoculars, but I also had to count them on a macro level by scanning the area for multiples.

I started out a bit too cocky. Of course I already knew which birds were coming to our feeders. We were regularly seeing 12 to 15 species and I had nailed those soon after moving to Santa Fe. Well, Project FeederWatch humbled me, and on my very first day. For several months I had been lazy about finches. I

*And just like that, 20 minutes into Day One, Project FeederWatch has offered me a great sense of satisfaction...*

settled for "There's a finch," even when I knew one of them looked different. Rather than researching the stranger, I just assumed he was a House Finch made redder in the early morning sun. But today I'm doing important citizen science, and it suddenly becomes essential to be sure.

The birds help me out when two males land on the birdbath and a close look through binoculars makes it clear that they are different. I'm an adequate enough birder to use the tools I have to figure things out. It's just a matter of taking the time to do it properly. With a little help from Mr. Sibley, I am able to correctly identify my first Cassin's Finch. And just like that, 20 minutes into Day One, Project FeederWatch offered me a great sense of satisfaction because I properly differentiated these two birds.

Here's what else I learned on Day One: Have bird guides and a camera at hand. Expect to feel a sense of accomplishment from helping with the project. There are different ways to see the world, and Project FeederWatch is about taking the time to really look. This type of citizen science suits me, and it converted me from someone who glances outside to see what might be there, to someone who studies what's really happening.

And yes, I do feel a children's story coming on. 📌

FeederWatcher Susan Wider's magazine articles for children and adults have appeared in *Bird Watcher's Digest* and other magazines. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

CASSIN'S FINCH BY DAVID F. SMITH



# Notes from FeederWatchers

## Acorns abound, affect FeederWatch counts

Betty Shannon of Placerville, California, reported an abundance of natural food including acorns at her count site last winter. “Acorns started falling in October, and by the end of November the ground was littered.” This abundance meant that the activity at Betty’s feeders changed. “During two count periods I did not see any Western Scrub-Jays—the first time that has happened since my first count winter in 1998–99. And, no surprise, the resident family of Acorn Woodpeckers was also absent from the feeders most of the winter.” At the end of the season, however, Betty was treated to a surprise as the largest flock of Band-tailed Pigeons to visit her yard, some 20 birds, descended on the oaks to glean the remaining acorns.

## Bronze Mannikins establish a foothold in Texas

With the Nutmeg Mannikin now established in parts of California, Texas, Mississippi, and Florida, is the similar Bronze Mannikin the next avian invader? Jim Sigmund of Cypress, Texas, reports that Bronze Mannikins may indeed be next. “Since March 1, I have had regular visits from up to nine Bronze Mannikins at my feeders. Nutmeg Mannikins have been around for several years, but these Bronze Mannikins are new.” Native to sub-Saharan Africa, Bronze Mannikins are small finches that are often kept in captivity. Based on how the Nutmeg Mannikins are increasing in number and returning year after year to Jim’s feeders, he predicts that the Bronze Mannikins will also proliferate.

## European visitor in Newfoundland

Louise Butler of Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, was intrigued when, “a small bird with a light rusty breast kept appearing along the tree line.” She saw the bird repeatedly, but it didn’t come close enough to take a picture. On March 12, however, she was able to take a picture as it fed briefly under her main feeder. With the help of a naturalist, Jeff Siddal, Louise identified the bird as a Common Chaffinch! This Eurasian species typically ranges from Scandinavia to northern Africa and has only been confirmed in northeastern North America on a handful of occasions. Louise and other local observers believe the skittish bird to be a wild individual.



**Left:** Common Chaffinch in Newfoundland.

**Right:** Two angles of “Goldie” the Red-bellied Woodpecker’s pale plumage coloration.



## “Goldie” the woodpecker

FeederWatcher Debbie Mennell from Warrenville, Illinois, sent photos of a very unusual Red-bellied Woodpecker with yellow-orange coloration in areas that are typically red. Superficially, the bird first appears to be a Golden-fronted Woodpecker (a species typically found in Oklahoma, Texas, and points south). Upon closer inspection, we believe that the bird shows signs of xanthochroism—meaning that red plumage is replaced by dull orange or yellow plumage. This is a rather rare mutation, but generally does not affect the normal life span of the individual.

Debbie wrote, “We have been living here for 30 years and have always had many woodpeckers in the area, Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied, with Red-headed passing through each spring and fall. This is the first time we have seen a Red-bellied Woodpecker with a striking plumage difference.” They named the unusual bird “Goldie,” and she’s a regular visitor to their suet feeder. According to Debbie, Goldie is associating with “quite a handsome male with vivid orange-red coloring. I am curious to see what the offspring look like.”



DEBBIE MENNELL (2)

# Large, brown, and spotted. What is it?

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Though primarily insect and fruit eaters, Hermit Thrushes and Brown Thrashers will sometimes come to feeders in winter for suet or mealworms. While many species of thrush winter south of the United States, the hardy Hermit Thrush spends the winter as far north as New England in the East and British Columbia on the West Coast. In winter, it sticks to the coastal regions in the West and the deep Southwest, but it can be found throughout the eastern U.S. in winter. The similar-looking Brown Thrasher winters at lower elevations throughout the southeastern U.S.

These two species are sometimes confused with the Wood Thrush, which winters in Central America,

and the Swainson's Thrush, which winters in Central and South America. Migrating Wood Thrushes and Swainson's Thrushes reach the southern states in early April. The Wood Thrush can be identified by its completely rufous back and spots that extend to the belly. The Swainson's Thrush has a completely olive-gray back and orange-buff colored spectacles, face, and throat. Note that very few Swainson's Thrush and almost no Wood Thrush spend the winter months in the U.S. or Canada. If you think that you see either of these species, be sure to snap a photo and submit your observation as a Rare Bird Report to FeederWatch. If the report is confirmed, your bird will be featured on the FeederWatch website!

## Distinguishing between the Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, and Wood Thrush

If you see a relatively large, brown, spotted bird at your feeders, look for these key features to help with identification. If you are uncertain, snap a photo and request assistance from FeederWatch staff.



ERROL TASKIN

### Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)

- Similar in shape to an American Robin, but smaller
- Olive-brown head and back that contrasts with a rufous tail
- White underparts with spots on the upper breast
- Thin white eye-ring around dark eye
- Sometimes bobs tail slowly up and down
- Fairly common winter resident in Mid-Atlantic states, across the South, and along the West Coast as far north as British Columbia



ERROL TASKIN

### Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)

- Similar in size to an American Robin, but with a longer tail
- Long, slightly curved bill and bright yellow eye
- Rufous-brown back and tail
- White underparts covered with extensive spots that form streaks from the upper chest to the undertail coverts
- Thin, white wingbars
- Regularly winters in the Southeast from Texas to New Jersey



KEVIN MCGOWAN

### Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) **\*\* Not likely in winter \*\***

- Often confused with Hermit Thrush and Brown Thrasher
- Very distinct, bold spots on a white breast
- Rufous-colored back
- Winters almost exclusively in Central America
- **If seen in North America in winter, snap a photo!** This is very unusual and confirmation is required.

# Ups and downs at feeders in Canada

BY KERRIE WILCOX,  
BIRD STUDIES CANADA



COMMON REDPOLL BY MICK ZERR

**T**his past winter, most Canadian participants were treated to an abundance of birds at their feeders. In fact, FeederWatch data show that on average, Canadians counted 56 individual birds at their feeders during each count. This number was topped only in 1992 with a record of 58 birds per count!

The high totals are largely the result of the widespread movement of irruptive species out of the bo-

real forests and to our feeders last winter. Here, we'll take a closer look at three irruptive passerines: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Blue Jay, and Bohemian Waxwing. Movements of these three species are often linked to boreal finches (like reppolls and siskins) which had an impressive showing in 2012–13. Generally, when cone and seed crops up north are poor, these species move south in search of food. Like the boreal finches, the nuthatches, jays, and waxwings also undergo cyclical patterns at our feeders—up one year and down the next. Red-breasted Nuthatches made a dramatic showing at feeders in Canada during the 2012–13 season, while Bohemian Waxwings and Blue Jays arrived in average numbers.

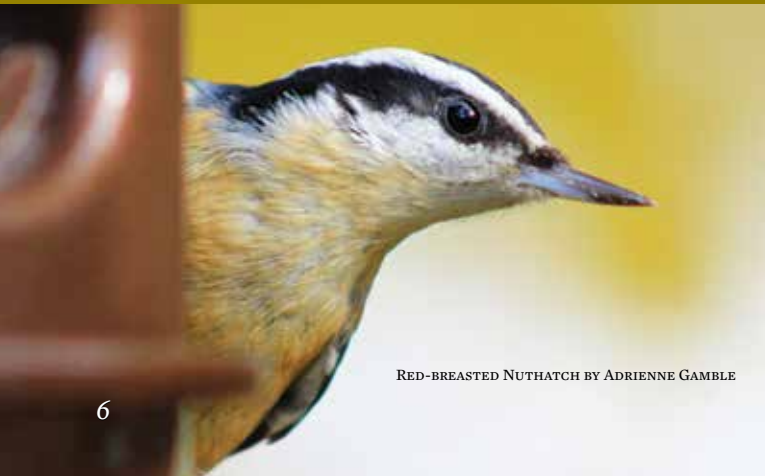


## Red-breasted Nuthatches

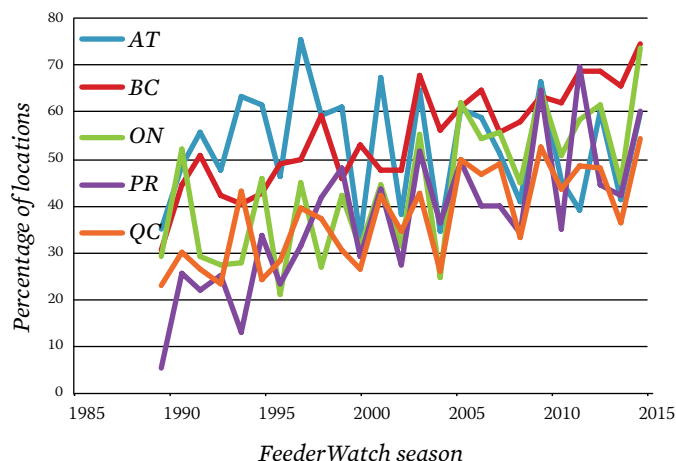
Red-breasted Nuthatches were widespread at Canadian feeders—reported in every province and in Yukon Territory. While the percentage of feeder visits by Red-Breasted Nuthatches varies between irruption and non-irruption years, there is an upward trend in observations. The Breeding Bird Survey also shows

significant increases in their populations, with growth estimated at 2.65% per year from 1970–2011. This past season, Red-breasted Nuthatches visited 64.5% of all FeederWatch sites in Canada at least once and made the top ten list in the Prairie provinces (10), Ontario (10) and in British Columbia (3)!

*Red-breasted Nuthatch:  
Seen at 65% of sites in Canada in 2012–13*



RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH BY ADRIENNE GAMBLE



**Graph:** In all regions, Red-breasted Nuthatch reports vary considerably from year-to-year while the overall trend shows an increase since the early days of FeederWatch.

## Blue Jays

FeederWatchers reported Blue Jays from Newfoundland to Alberta with a few scattered reports in southern British Columbia. Declines in the early 2000s may have been related to the spread of West Nile virus. Today, Blue Jay reports are comparable to the long-term average although Cliff Sandeson in Brookfield, Nova Scotia, reported a whopping 53 individual birds at his feeders!

**Did you know?** Blue Jays store food for later consumption (a process called “hoarding” or “caching”). Acorns, beech mast, hickory, and other nuts are often transported several at a time to be buried in the bird’s breeding territories, as far as 4km (2.5 miles) from the original source.



BLUE JAY BY MISSY MANDEL

*“It was most amazing to have chokecherries on the trees one hour and have them ‘stripped’ in the next by the Bohemian Waxwings—such beautiful birds.”*

—Alberta Sweet, Calgary, Alberta

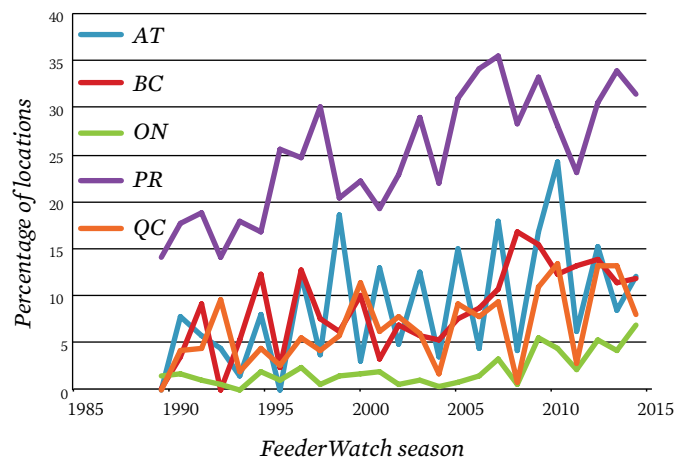


BOHEMIAN WAXWING BY NICK SAUNDERS

## Bohemian Waxwings

FeederWatchers reported Bohemian Waxwings in every province this season. Sightings at feeders are unpredictable and exciting because Bohemian Waxwings are nomadic in winter. FeederWatch data suggest that Bohemian Waxwings are visiting more backyards than when the project began. The largest flock of Bohemian Waxwings was reported by Eva Durance in Naramata, British Columbia, who had approximately 2,000 birds descend on her backyard!

**Did you know?** Bohemian Waxwings can eat two to three times their weight in berries every day. The large flocks help them to overwhelm territorial birds that try to defend fruit sources for themselves.



**Graph:** Bohemian Waxwing reports in winter are highly variable from year-to-year, particularly in the Atlantic Provinces (AT).

# Regional roundup

## Trends and highlights from the 2012–13 FeederWatch season

BY DAVID BONTER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY



PINYON JAYS BY PAM KOCH

Late in the summer of 2012, well before the leaves began to turn and thoughts turned to FeederWatching, an initial trickle of birds from the northern forests soon turned into a torrential southward movement.

Red-breasted Nuthatches led the way and were soon followed by Pine Siskins—many stopping only briefly in northern states on their way to wintering areas as far south as the Gulf Coast. These early departures signaled that a large irruption was underway and redpolls, crossbills, and Pine Grosbeaks also soon appeared at feeders in areas that had not seen these species in several years. These massive movements brought novelty and excitement to many feed-

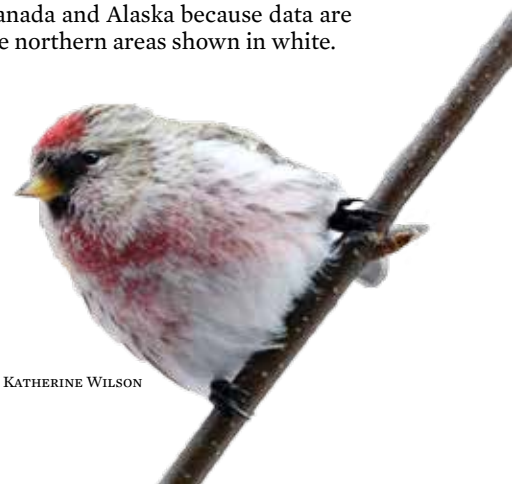
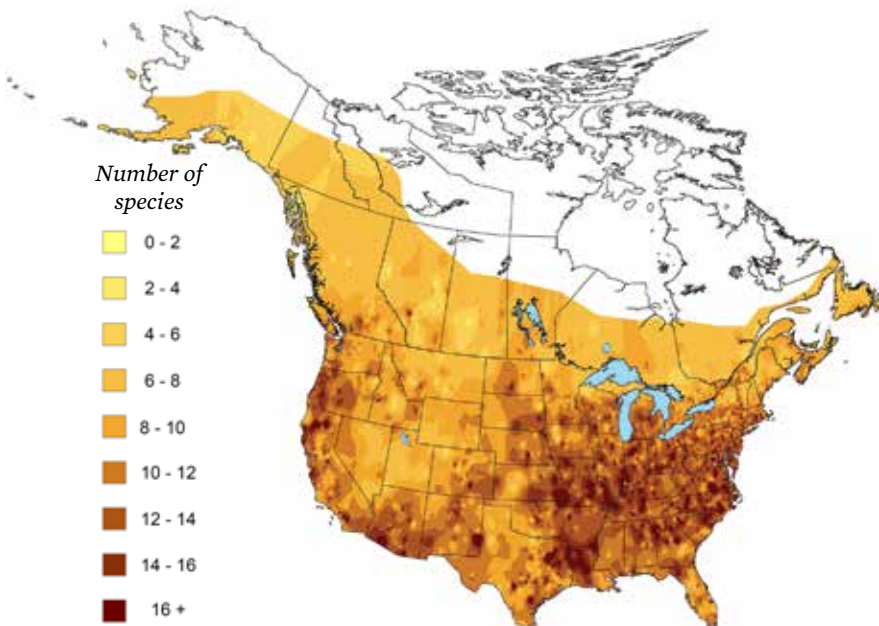
ing stations, particularly in areas that rarely host these species.

As winter lingered in many areas, so too did the winter finches. Northward migration was delayed—particularly when compared to the early spring migration in 2012—and many blackbirds waited until after the FeederWatch season ended before arriving across the northern tier of the lower 48 states and southern Canada.

Further highlights of the 2012–13 season are found in the regional summaries that follow. The Top-25 lists are based on the percentage of FeederWatch locations in the region that hosted each species at least once between November 2012 and April 2013. To see Top-25 lists for each state or province, visit the Explore section of the FeederWatch website.

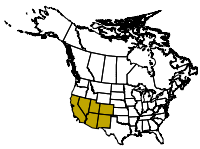
### Average species diversity on a typical FeederWatch count

**Map:** Species diversity on an average FeederWatch count varies across the continent. Fewer species tend to be seen in the mountainous West and at higher latitudes in Canada and northern New England. No information is shown for Hawaii and northern Canada and Alaska because data are sparse across the northern areas shown in white.



COMMON REDPOLL BY KATHERINE WILSON



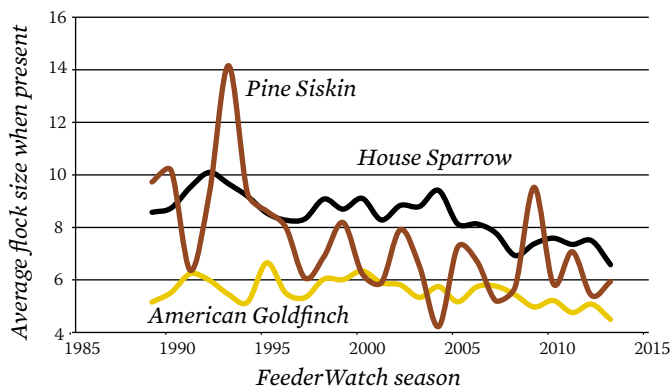


# Southwest & California Regions

## TOP-25 LIST: 911 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2012–13	Average		2012–13	Average
1	1	House Finch	90	89
2	2	Dark-eyed Junco	81	81
3	4	Mourning Dove	67	64
4	4	Western Scrub-Jay	59	62
5	5	White-crowned Sparrow	59	59
6	6	House Sparrow	57	59
7	8	American Robin	57	53
8	18	Lesser Goldfinch	53	36
9	9	Northern Flicker	53	49
10	10	American Goldfinch	50	48
11	12	Pine Siskin	48	42
12	10	Anna's Hummingbird	47	49
13	28	Eurasian Collared-Dove	42	27
14	25	American Crow	39	25
15	12	Spotted Towhee	39	40
16	18	White-breasted Nuthatch	38	30
17	22	Downy Woodpecker	35	26
18	15	California Towhee	35	35
19	28	Cooper's Hawk	34	23
20	15	European Starling	32	33
21	29	Bushtit	31	22
22	19	"Plain" Titmouse*	30	29
23	18	Steller's Jay	30	31
24	24	Mountain Chickadee	29	25
25	26	Black-capped Chickadee	29	24

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



**Graph:** Although more sites than usual hosted Pine Siskins (brown), flock sizes were average where siskins were reported. House Sparrow (black) and American Goldfinch (yellow) flock sizes are on the decline in the region.

The Eurasian Collared-Dove continues its march towards the regional Top-10 list and is now seen at more than 40% of sites with an increasing average flock size (>3.4 birds). Also on the increase in the region are Bushtits—seen at 30% of sites (up from 10% of sites when FeederWatch began) and approaching the Top-20.

Irruptive movements into the southwestern portion of the U.S. were not as impressive in 2012–13 as in other regions, but one in four FeederWatchers hosted Red-breasted Nuthatches at their feeders, an increase over the long-term average of 16% of sites. It was also a good winter for White-breasted Nuthatches as more sites reported this species than ever before. Pine Siskins were seen at 48% of locations, the best showing since 2008–09, but the average flock size of 5.9 birds was below the long-term average of 7.4 birds.

It was a good year for finding Cooper's Hawks in the region with the percentage of sites reporting this raptor (34%) doubling since FeederWatch began in the 1980s.

Golden-crowned Sparrows were seen at fewer sites than ever (22%) with the smallest average flock sizes on record (3.4 birds). Abnormally low flock sizes were also recorded for House Sparrow (6.6 birds, down from >9 in the 1980s) and American Goldfinch (4.5 birds, average = 5.6).

### Western Scrub-Jay: Seen at 59% of sites



JACK SURTON

Nearly half of all FeederWatchers in the region enjoyed hosting Pine Siskins last winter in the largest movement of this species into the Southeast and South-Central states since FeederWatch began. At locations hosting siskins, the average flock size also reached record levels (7.9 birds). Also irrupting into the region from the north, the Red-breasted Nuthatch visited 32% of sites after being scarcely reported in 2012–13 (recorded at only 4% of sites).

Eastern Bluebirds visited more than half of all FeederWatch locations for the first winter on record, more than doubling the totals from the early days of the project. It was also a good year for the White-breasted Nuthatch (second-best showing in history) and Eastern Phoebe (seen at 29% of sites, a 5% increase over 2011–12).

On the downside, some ground-feeding sparrows made a poor showing last winter with record low reports of White-throated Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco, while reports of Song Sparrow and Chipping Sparrow were comparable with past seasons. Common Grackles dropped to an all-time low with flock sizes dropping by more than two birds, on average, since FeederWatch began.

## Southeast & South-Central Regions

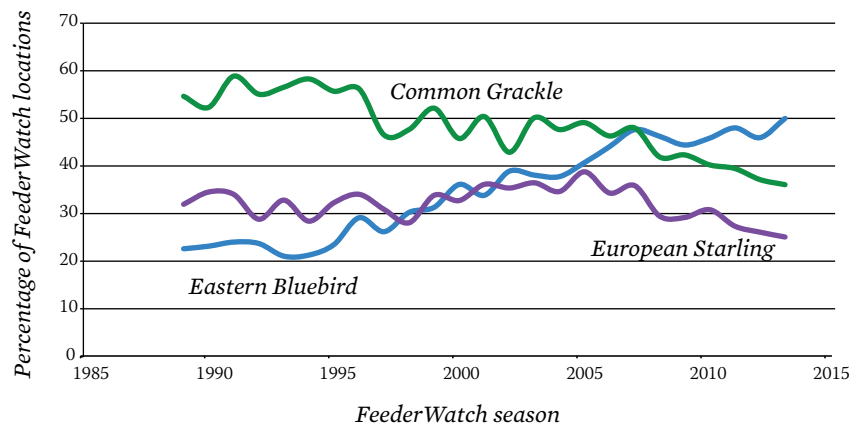


### TOP-25 LIST: 1,293 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2012–13	Average		2012–13	Average
1	1	Northern Cardinal	97	97
2	2	Mourning Dove	88	90
3	5	Carolina Chickadee	86	80
4	4	American Goldfinch	86	84
5	5	Tufted Titmouse	80	83
6	7	Carolina Wren	78	76
7	10	House Finch	78	67
8	5	Blue Jay	76	83
9	8	Red-bellied Woodpecker	73	74
10	12	Northern Mockingbird	70	61
11	12	Downy Woodpecker	67	62
12	10	Dark-eyed Junco	59	66
13	13	American Robin	59	60
14	24	Eastern Bluebird	50	35
15	14	White-throated Sparrow	50	55
16	18	Chipping Sparrow	49	44
17	22	Yellow-rumped Warbler	49	38
18	33	Pine Siskin	46	24
19	22	White-breasted Nuthatch	44	39
20	22	American Crow	43	38
21	20	Red-winged Blackbird	42	42
22	19	Brown-headed Cowbird	40	44
23	22	House Sparrow	40	40
24	16	Common Grackle	36	48
25	29	Pine Warbler	35	29



EASTERN BLUEBIRD BY WILLIAM POTTER



**Graph:** Common Grackles (green) are visiting fewer FeederWatch locations each year, while Eastern Bluebirds (blue) are on the increase. European Starling (purple) reports have recently declined.



# Pacific Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regions

## TOP-25 LIST: 1,110 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2012-13	Average		2012-13	Average
1	1	Dark-eyed Junco	89	88
2	2	Black-capped Chickadee	82	80
3	5	Northern Flicker	78	68
4	8	Red-breasted Nuthatch	73	57
5	4	House Finch	72	71
6	6	Pine Siskin	68	63
7	7	American Robin	63	60
8	10	Downy Woodpecker	63	55
9	9	Song Sparrow	59	54
10	9	Spotted Towhee	58	54
11	11	European Starling	55	51
12	11	Steller's Jay	53	52
13	15	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	50	42
14	11	House Sparrow	47	52
15	15	Varied Thrush	44	41
16	35	Anna's Hummingbird	44	18
17	19	American Crow	37	31
18	17	American Goldfinch	36	35
19	19	Hairy Woodpecker	34	30
20	26	Bushtit	34	22
21	21	Fox Sparrow	32	28
22	30	Common Redpoll	31	19
23	22	Sharp-shinned Hawk	29	27
24	26	Golden-crowned Sparrow	27	21
25	21	Red-winged Blackbird	27	27

**A** graph of the numbers of the irruptive Pine Siskin in the region typically resembles a roller coaster with annual rankings peaking at #4 and dipping as low as #18. Data from the 2012-13 season show siskins at a large percentage of sites (#6 ranking) despite a below-average flock size of 6.4 birds (long-term average = 7.4). FeederWatchers enjoyed an above-average showing of Common Redpolls for the second consecutive winter with the largest average flock size (12.1 birds) since the 1995-96 season.

Red-breasted Nuthatches visited a record-high proportion of feeder sites and jumped to #4 on the regional list for the first time in FeederWatch history. Reports of chickadees were also strong in the region. Black-capped Chickadees (82% of sites), Chestnut-backed Chickadees (50% of sites) and Mountain Chickadees (25% of sites) all reached near-record highs.

The Anna's Hummingbird continues a rapid move up the charts, gaining 20 spots in the last decade. The apparent northward winter range expansion of this species deserves further research. Cooper's Hawks also continue to climb the charts and were recorded at 24% of sites in the region.

FeederWatchers in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountains appear to have benefited from the movement of Pine Grosbeaks out of areas to the north. With 12% of sites hosting Pine Grosbeaks, chances were relatively good of seeing this species in the region last winter.

Showing potentially declining populations, the average House Finch flock size dropped to just below 5 birds for the first time (long-term average = 6.6). European Starling flock sizes also dropped to an all-time low. It was a relatively poor year for the American Goldfinch in the region with the percentage of sites hosting goldfinches and the average flock sizes lagging behind averages from the last decade.

### Anna's Hummingbird: Moving toward the regional Top 10



SAM WILSON

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



Nuthatches abounded in the northeastern corner of North America during the 2012–13 season! Red-breasted Nuthatches moved through the region early and stayed for the winter, visiting the greatest percentage of sites in FeederWatch history (64%, previous record was 58% in 2007–08). White-breasted Nuthatches, a more consistent feature of the winter landscape, were also seen in record-breaking numbers, visiting 88% of sites.

Like the Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins also moved into the region early, but most continued south and left the Northeast before the FeederWatch season began. Only 29% of sites hosted siskins during the season, a figure that does not capture the large-scale movement of this species last winter. Common Redpolls, on the other hand, did stay in the region and were recorded at near-record numbers. The 43% of sites hosting redpolls was a large increase over 11% of sites during the previous season and second only to the 53% of sites recording the species during 1993–94.

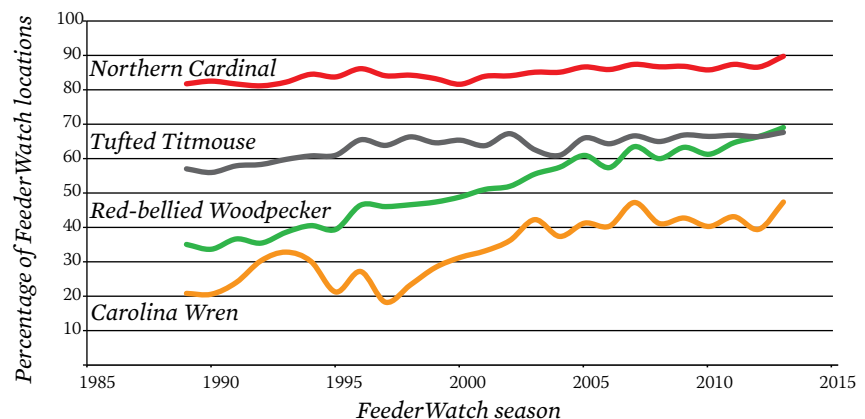
A number of species are continuing to expand their presence in the region with a record percentage of sites hosting Northern Cardinals and Tufted Titmice. Likewise, Red-bellied Woodpeckers moved into the regional Top 10 for the first time ever, and Carolina Wrens were reported at 47% of FeederWatch sites. Fewer than 20% of sites hosted Carolina Wrens when the project began in the 1980s.

A number of buntings surprised FeederWatchers in the region with Indigo Buntings photographed in Newfoundland, Kentucky, and Ontario, a Lazuli Bunting in Pennsylvania, and a Painted Bunting in Ohio.

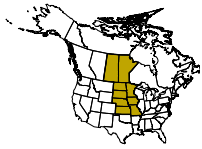
## TOP-25 LIST: 5,941 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2012–13	Average		2012–13	Average
1	1	Chickadee*	98	96
2	3	Dark-eyed Junco	93	91
3	5	Downy Woodpecker	92	88
4	2	Mourning Dove	92	92
5	6	Northern Cardinal	90	85
6	4	Blue Jay	89	90
7	8	White-breasted Nuthatch	88	78
8	7	American Goldfinch	88	85
9	9	House Finch	75	76
10	16	Red-bellied Woodpecker	69	51
11	11	Tufted Titmouse	68	63
12	11	European Starling	67	67
13	14	Hairy Woodpecker	67	54
14	23	Red-breasted Nuthatch	64	34
15	12	House Sparrow	64	64
16	17	American Robin	56	50
17	16	American Crow	55	53
18	15	Common Grackle	51	52
19	20	White-throated Sparrow	48	42
20	20	Red-winged Blackbird	47	42
21	23	Carolina Wren	47	34
22	18	Song Sparrow	47	48
23	34	Common Redpoll	43	18
24	22	American Tree Sparrow	40	37
25	30	Cooper's Hawk	35	20

\* Combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee



**Graph:** Numerous species are becoming more common at feeders in the region including Northern Cardinal (red), Tufted Titmouse (gray), Red-bellied Woodpecker (green), and Carolina Wren (orange).



## North-Central & Mid-Central Regions

### TOP-25 LIST: 799 SITES REPORTING

Rank			Percentage of Sites	
2012-13	Average	Species	2012-13	Average
1	1	Chickadee*	95	95
2	3	Downy Woodpecker	91	89
3	3	Dark-eyed Junco	86	90
4	7	White-breasted Nuthatch	84	75
5	3	Blue Jay	84	88
6	6	American Goldfinch	75	77
7	8	Northern Cardinal	72	71
8	10	House Finch	71	63
9	7	House Sparrow	71	76
10	10	Hairy Woodpecker	67	64
11	12	Red-bellied Woodpecker	64	56
12	13	Mourning Dove	57	53
13	13	American Robin	52	54
14	21	Red-breasted Nuthatch	49	33
15	12	European Starling	49	59
16	16	American Crow	47	45
17	26	Common Redpoll	45	25
18	21	Pine Siskin	43	34
19	18	Northern Flicker	35	36
20	17	Purple Finch	34	40
21	16	Common Grackle	33	43
22	21	Tufted Titmouse	32	30
23	21	Red-winged Blackbird	29	30
24	22	American Tree Sparrow	28	27
25	27	Pileated Woodpecker	27	19

\* Combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee

*Red-breasted Nuthatch reports broke records across the lower 48 states in 2012-13.*



Many irruptive species leaving the northern Canadian forests settled in the center of the continent last winter with Common Redpolls reported at 45% of locations in the region, the most in FeederWatch history. It was a finch year in general with relatively large average flock sizes of redpolls (11.7 birds), Pine Siskins (5.1), American Goldfinch (5.6), House Finch (4.2), and Purple Finch (3.2) at locations hosting these species.

Pine Siskins returned to the Top-25 list after a poor year in 2011-12 while the Red-breasted Nuthatch jumped 11 spots over the previous season and was seen at half of FeederWatch sites. Other irruptive species also made a strong showing, with Pine Grosbeaks seen at a remarkable 16% of sites, well above the long-term average of less than 10% of sites. Red Crossbills were relatively uncommon (4% of sites) but were still reported at more locations in the region than at any time in the last 25 years.

Although common in 2012-13, Blue Jays were reported at fewer locations than in any previous season. Reports of American Robins (52% of sites) and White-throated Sparrows (21%) were a bit lower than expected as these species were seen at fewer locations than in any season since 2002. Numbers for Brown-headed Cowbirds, Common Grackles, and Red-winged Blackbirds were all low, suggesting a late spring in the region. These species tend to appear late in the FeederWatch season as they begin their northward migrations in March and early-April.

Eurasian Collared-Doves are not rapidly increasing in the region, in contrast to other regions, as reports have remained stable for the past 4 seasons (seen at 11% of sites).

Unexpected sightings in the region included a Rufous Hummingbird in Tecumseh, Kansas, a Summer Tanager in Hutchinson, Minnesota, and an Eastern Towhee in Manigotagan, Manitoba.

KRISTIN OLSEN

# Alaska & Northern Canada



Common Redpolls returned to the top of the charts with their best showing since 2009 and flocks averaging more than 26 birds (compared to the long-term average flock size of 17 birds). Near-record flock sizes were also recorded for Pine Siskin and Hoary Redpoll, and more FeederWatchers reported Varied Thrush than ever before (21% of sites). Gray Jay numbers were strong, keeping the species in the regional Top 10 for the second consecutive year. Following a record-breaking season in 2011-12, Pine Grosbeak reports were greatly reduced in 2012-13. Sharp-shinned Hawk reports also dropped dramatically after a record high the previous season. Downy Woodpeckers were seen at 20% fewer locations in 2012-13 and dropped out of the Top 10 for the first time in FeederWatch history.

## TOP-10 LIST: 61 SITES REPORTING

Rank			Percentage of Sites	
2012-13	Average	Species	2012-13	Average
1	2	Common Redpoll	79	78
2	1	Black-capped Chickadee	74	83
3	5	Boreal Chickadee	57	57
4	5	Black-billed Magpie	56	55
5	5	Pine Grosbeak	54	59
6	8	Dark-eyed Junco	52	44
7	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	52	50
8	8	Hairy Woodpecker	52	50
9	11	Common Raven	48	37
10	10	Gray Jay	48	37

## Your Legacy for Birds



Contributing data to Project FeederWatch is an important way to leave a lasting legacy. A pledge of financial support through a gift in your estate plans is a way to help ensure that FeederWatch thrives into the future.

To learn more about planned giving, please visit us at <http://birds.cornell.giftplans.org/> or donate to FeederWatch by visiting <http://birds.cornell.edu/donate> and selecting FeederWatch under Citizen Science in the left column.

In Canada, please visit [www.birdscanada.org](http://www.birdscanada.org) and click on "Support BSC."

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH BY DARCY SIMIE

## 2012-13 FeederWatch Season Statistics

20,569 PARTICIPANTS • 127,210 CHECKLISTS • 7,308,691 BIRDS REPORTED




LEWIS'S WOODPECKER BY PAM KOCH

# FeederWatch fans show us their best shots

BY SUSAN NEWMAN, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

**F**eederWatch initiated a new weekly photo contest called “BirdSpotter” during the 2012–13 season. With support from our sponsor, Bob’s Red Mill, the contest ran through Facebook with online photo submission and voting. The weekly themes inspired a number of interesting submissions that ranged from stunning images to quirky, funny snapshots like the series of bird/rodent interactions shown here. We received 5,017 total entries and 36,292 online votes.

Catherine Diehl-Robbins came away with the grand prize for her beautiful Pine Grosbeak (below). Along with numerous prizes from the Lab of Ornithology and Bob’s Red Mill, Catherine won a trip to Bob’s headquarters in Oregon and a birding trip around Portland. Thanks to everyone who voted and entered photos, and congratulations to all of our BirdSpotter weekly winners!

Keep your cameras ready because BirdSpotter will return in November. In order to allow for wider participation, the contest will run through the FeederWatch website instead of Facebook during the coming season. 



A squirrel sniffs a Mourning Dove.

CECELIA FURCH



A face-off between a Cooper’s Hawk and a squirrel.

HOLLY VANDENBRINK



The 2012–13 BirdSpotter Contest Grand Prize winning photo was a Pine Grosbeak.

CATHERINE DIEHL-ROBBINS



A chipmunk and a Pileated Woodpecker share a drink.

KENT HILLS



A Pygmy Nuthatch gains a unique perspective.

CHRISTINE HAINES



# Science About Feeder Birds

BY DAVID BONTER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

## Woodpeckers vs. invasive beetles

If you were a woodpecker, you'd be quite pleased to find a superabundance of wood-boring beetles invading your neighborhood. The new food resource would allow you to easily find food and raise young. Recent analyses of FeederWatch data<sup>1</sup> suggest that woodpeckers and nuthatches are enjoying a temporary pulse of food resources as the emerald ash borer, a non-native beetle, works its way through the Midwestern forests. The borer specializes in tunneling inside ash trees to find food and lay eggs. This invader is having a devastating impact on forests, destroying millions of ash trees from Michigan to New York. As it moves, however, enormous numbers of beetles are providing a feast for birds including Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied woodpeckers and the White-breasted Nuthatch. In addition to the new food resources, the beetles leave standing dead trees behind, creating an abundance of potential nesting locations for these birds—at least temporarily. Cornell Lab researchers analyzed data from areas of the beetle outbreak and compared woodpecker and nuthatch counts to nearby locations with little evidence of beetle damage. The results suggest that the beetle invasion is temporarily enhancing the survival or reproductive success of birds that prey upon the beetles in the infested regions.

## Tracking feeder birds reveals new insights

Tracking the feeding behavior of individual birds in the wild can be extremely difficult, particularly over long periods of time. A new study, however, uses small transmitters to reveal remarkable new insights on the use of bird feeders by wild chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches. The research, conducted at Cornell University and sponsored by Project FeederWatch, recorded more than 470,000 visits to specially “wired” bird feeders<sup>2</sup>. The feeders record the date and time of each visit by individual birds, providing a wealth of information on daily and seasonal use of supplemental food. Focusing on the short, cold days of winter, the research reveals that birds begin foraging at first light (before sunrise) and feed continually throughout the day. Although theory predicts that the birds should balance the risks of starvation and predation and limit their feeding to intensive bouts after sunrise and before sunset, the results clearly showed that birds actively foraged all day long. Given the high energy demands of a northern winter, these results suggest that the birds' behaviors are geared toward avoiding starvation, even if that means exposing themselves to a greater risk of predation.

<sup>1</sup> Koenig, Liebhold, Bonter, Hochachka, and Dickinson. 2013. Effects of the emerald ash borer invasion on four species of birds. *Biological Invasions*.

<sup>2</sup> Bonter, Zuckerberg, Sedgwick, and Hochachka. 2013. Daily foraging patterns in free-living birds: exploring the predation-starvation tradeoff. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.



CAROLINA CHICKADEE BY ROBERT VUXINIC