

2015–16 Project FeederWatch

End-of-Season News Note

Thank you for another successful FeederWatch season! See inside this letter to learn what the new bird interaction monitoring project is already telling researchers, to learn what's happening with Bushtit reports in the West, and more. As we begin to analyze the data from the 29th season, you can see initial results online in the Explore Data section of our website. Look for more details in *Winter Bird Highlights*, published in October.

Time to renew

Please take a moment to renew your participation for next season. With each additional year in the project, your counts become more valuable to researchers studying the distribution and abundance of feeder birds. Thank you for your continued support. **Please renew your FeederWatch membership today by following the instructions on the back page of this letter.**

Why renew so early?

Renewing now will allow us to save resources on future reminders and will help us better plan for the upcoming season. FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by you, the participants, and renewing early helps us keep our expenses low and make the most of your financial support.

Renew through our online store

Save postage and time by renewing through our online store. Click the Join or Renew button on our home page and select whether or not you would like to receive a kit.

Save paper—skip the kit

All renewing participants receive a kit with a calendar and *Winter Bird Highlights* unless you choose the option to save paper and skip the kit.

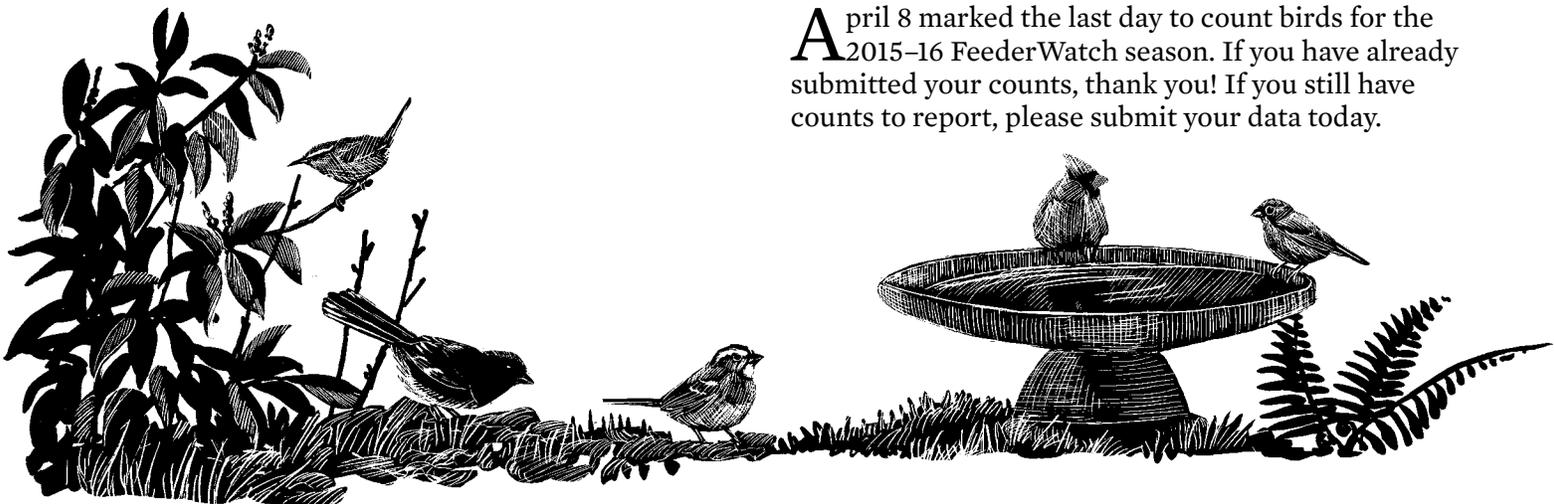
If you would like to forego the kit:

- ◆ Please **select the “Save paper” option** on the enclosed coupon.
- ◆ Please **write down your ID number** (printed near your address on the renewal coupon) and save it.
- ◆ Please **note that next season starts on November 12.**
- ◆ Please **maintain your electronic newsletter subscription** to get the latest updates and reminders. **You probably will receive no other communication from Project FeederWatch.** If you think the newsletter may not be reaching you, subscribe by clicking the “Sign up for eNews” link in the top right corner of our home page (there's no risk of double subscribing) or learn more about the newsletter on our website: feederwatch.org/about/enews-archive. Note that spam blockers may prevent you from receiving this newsletter. Set your spam filter to allow email from feederwatch@cornell.edu.



Submit your counts

April 8 marked the last day to count birds for the 2015–16 FeederWatch season. If you have already submitted your counts, thank you! If you still have counts to report, please submit your data today.



Pilot study to enter bird interaction observations

Cornell Lab researcher Eliot Miller created an online tool to collect data about bird interactions observed by FeederWatch participants on count days. He is collecting data about three types of interactions: displacement, where one bird causes another to relinquish its position near a food source; mobbing, where one or more birds harass another; and predation, where one bird attacks and eats another. Read more about this exciting new project on our blog at feederwatch.org/blog/tell-us-about-bird-behavior-at-your-feeder.



CHARLES ROSE IV

Eastern Bluebirds competing for a nestbox.

As of early March, we had received more than 1,000 reports from 140+ participants about interactions for 68 different bird species! Denise Doctor of Wilmette, Illinois, wrote, "I can't wait for my next counting days to watch and send in the various behaviors." Eliot has been summarizing the observations as they come in, and has already generated some interesting diagrams. He is posting his findings online at eliotmiller.weebly.com/feederwatch-interactions.html.

Displacement events have been most frequently observed, making up 93% of the observations submitted

More FeederWatchers reporting Bushtits

In last year's News Note, we told you about a pattern on the West Coast in Anna's Hummingbirds; these little nectivores are staying farther north in winter, particularly in habitats that are occupied by people. Your backyards seem to be a haven for these hummingbirds.

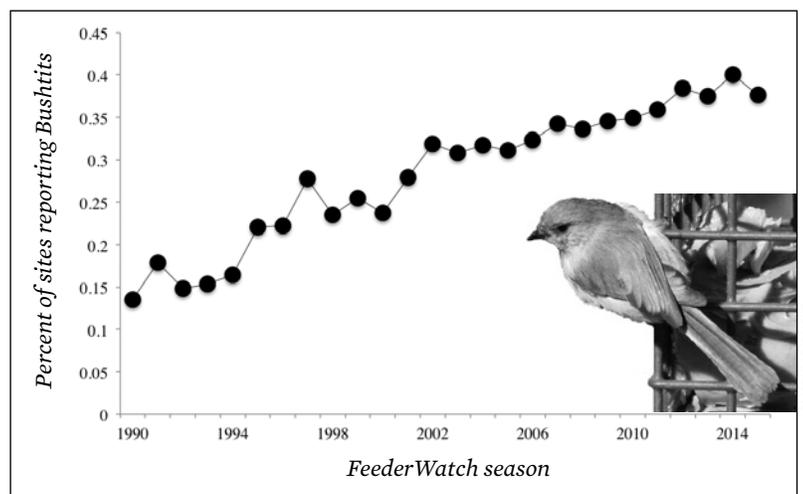
This season, we noticed a long-term increase in another western species: the Bushtit. These small birds aren't nectivores like the hummingbirds, but they do enjoy feasting on suet provided by FeederWatchers. This species has been reported at an increasingly large proportion of western sites, from about 10% of sites in 1990 to about 30% of sites in 2014. Exactly what is causing this change? We aren't yet sure, but we are investigating whether or not Bushtits are more likely to colonize areas with more people. Although many of our feathered friends like being out in the wilderness, there are many species that seem to prefer being in slightly modified habitats,

so far. These observations constitute a treasure trove of interesting interactions. Overall, it looks like body mass predicts dominance between close relatives and that these relationships start to break down between less closely related species. For instance, Downy Woodpeckers are frequently displaced by larger woodpeckers. Yet the Downy Woodpecker's distant and often smaller relative, the House Sparrow, sometimes displaces it from feeders.

Mobbing was the next most frequently observed interaction. As those of you with Northern Mockingbirds might have guessed, this species frequently mobs other species. Predator species being mobbed included Red-tailed Hawk, Barred Owl, Cooper's Hawk, and Eastern Screech-Owl.

The behavior category with the fewest reports was predation, which shows just how rare it is to observe a predation event. Nevertheless, we are already seeing some patterns: Sharp-shinned Hawks tend to eat smaller prey than Cooper's Hawks. This pattern has been reported by other scientific studies, but the continental scale of our study, in combination with lists of what birds were present at the feeder, means we should ultimately be able to offer tremendous insight into the diets of these hawks. Fully one-third of the predation events observed were of hawks taking House Sparrows and European Starlings.

The project has shown great potential in the short time it has been running, and we hope to continue the project next year.



Proportion of sites reporting Bushtits in Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia from 1990–2014 (8,371 total sites).

such as our backyards. Stay tuned for more details, and keep sending in those counts!

What did El Niño blow in?

FeederWatchers this season watched for changes at their feeders as El Niño storms pummeled the West and brought record-breaking warm temperatures to the East. A few people wrote to us about Fox Sparrow and Baltimore Oriole sightings that made us wonder if some species stayed farther north than usual this year. We are eager to look at the data to see what we find, and we will report any findings in next fall's *Winter Bird Highlights*.

Although only one Fox Sparrow report was considered rare—a sighting by Daniel Hunt in Pocatello, Idaho—several participants at the northern edge of the Fox Sparrow

range found these sparrows at their feeders this winter. For example, David Tanguay posted photos in the Participants Photo Gallery of a Fox Sparrow at his feeders in Windham, Maine. Annette Pasek wrote to us about a Fox Sparrow at her feeders in Glastonbury, Connecticut, and Joan Wiitanen posted photos of a Fox Sparrow in the snow in Houghton County, Michigan. Pat Stone of Mahwah, New Jersey, sent us photos and video of a bird she couldn't identify, which turned out to be a Fox Spar-



Fox Sparrow in Windham, Maine, by David Tanguay.

row. She wrote, "I have never heard of a Fox Sparrow, much less seen one." Fox Sparrows winter in the eastern United States, usually only as far north as Illinois and southern New England.

In addition to Fox Sparrows, we received many reports of Baltimore Orioles in the Northeast. Taffy McGann in Orleans, Massachusetts, wrote about a female at her suet feeder: "This bird was very puffed up and looked cold. It spent the whole day on the suet feeder." Paul Thompson and Marilyn Drucker from Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania, noticed a young bird that "only stayed for a few minutes to look for food." Paul Tanebaum of Bel Air, Maryland, had a "return customer" to his suet feeder this winter. Baltimore Orioles typically migrate to the southeastern U.S. and to Central and South America for the winter, but with the increasingly mild winters, many seem to be staying in more northern locations throughout the winter, enjoying the suet and jelly put out by Feeder-Watchers.

Keep those reports coming in because we want to track any changes in migration patterns over the years. Are the changes temporary, or are species like Baltimore Orioles going to make a habit of overwintering in the North?

House Finch photo wins BirdSpotter Grand Prize

The competition in this year's BirdSpotter photo contest was phenomenal. The Grand Prize went to Janet Lewis of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her photo of a male House Finch perched on a snow-covered branch looks like the cover of a holiday card!

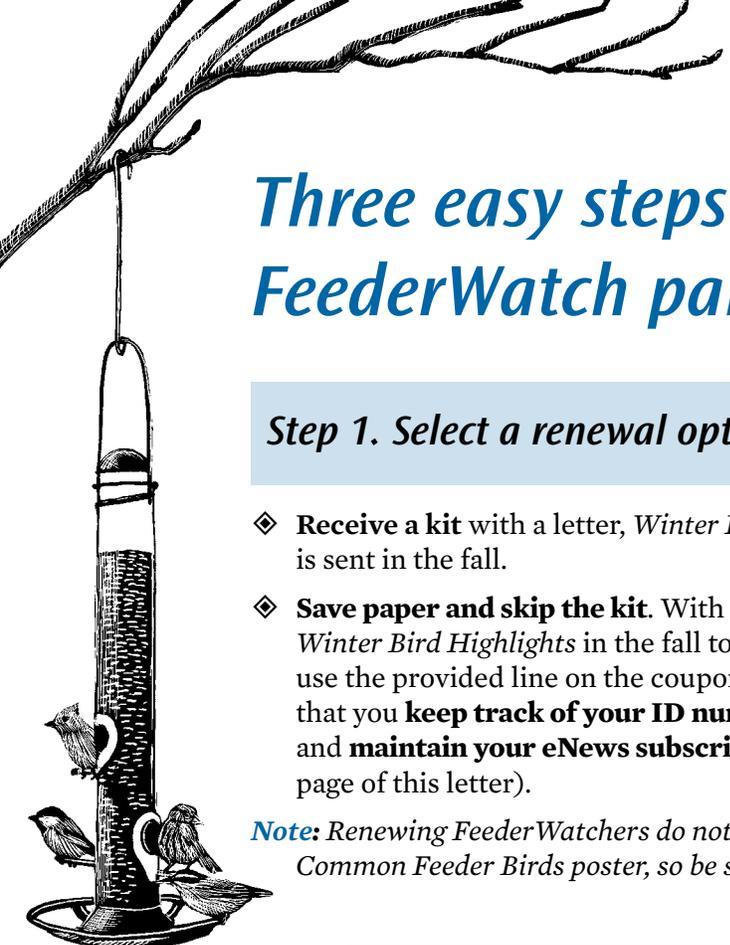
Droll Yankees sponsored this year's contest. They provided great bird feeders and accessories for all the weekly winners. In addition to prizes from Droll Yankees, winners received an array of goodies from the Cornell Lab.

Thanks to everyone who submitted photos and voted for their favorites. The contest featured nearly 3,500 photos and had more than 12,000 voters! View the top



BirdSpotter Photo Contest Grand Prize winning photo of a House Finch by Janet Lewis.

three Grand Prize winners and the weekly People's Choice and Judges' Choice winners at feederwatch.org/birdspotter2015.



Three easy steps for renewing your FeederWatch participation

Step 1. Select a renewal option

- ◆ **Receive a kit** with a letter, *Winter Bird Highlights*, and a Bird-Watching Days calendar. The kit is sent in the fall.
- ◆ **Save paper and skip the kit.** With this option, we will send a message with a link to a PDF of *Winter Bird Highlights* in the fall to the email address printed on the renewal coupon. Please use the provided line on the coupon to correct your email address if needed. We recommend that you **keep track of your ID number** (printed above your address on the enclosed coupon) and **maintain your eNews subscription** (see electronic newsletter information on the front page of this letter).

Note: *Renewing FeederWatchers do not receive the FeederWatch Handbook & Instructions or the Common Feeder Birds poster, so be sure to save them from your first kit.*

Step 2. Send \$18 (\$15 for Lab members) annual fee

- ◆ **Over the Internet.** Sign up using a credit card (VISA, Mastercard, DISCOVER, or American Express) over our secure server at www.feederwatch.org by clicking on the Join or Renew button on our home page. If you have a new name or address, please renew by mail and include your name or address change with your renewal to assure that you are not assigned a second ID number.
- ◆ **By mail.** Indicate your renewal option on the enclosed renewal coupon and return the coupon with your personal check or credit card information in the enclosed envelope.
- ◆ **By phone.** Call our membership office toll free at 866-989-2473 to renew by phone.

Note: *A tax-deductible contribution to FeederWatch above your \$18 renewal fee will help fund bird research and conservation at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Thanks for your support!*

Step 3. Renew by May 31

Your early renewal helps us plan how many kits to print and saves us the cost of sending another reminder. We will transfer the savings into research and project improvements.