

Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2010–11

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology



BIRD STUDIES CANADA
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX



The season for storing food is coming to an end, and individual chickadees, nuthatches, titmice, and jays have cached thousands of seeds and other food items for the winter. They are ready. Are you? The 25th anniversary season of Project FeederWatch is upon us, and we eagerly await the surprises that are in store for us this coming winter. Has the march of the Eurasian Collared-Dove across North America progressed? Will Evening Grosbeaks continue to fade from our memories? Which species will show up in a completely unexpected location, looking for a handout from a lucky FeederWatcher? Each season brings mystery, wonder, and joy to our feeders. Whether you are new to FeederWatching or have been with us for a quarter of a century, we encourage you to sit back, take a close look, and enjoy the marvelous birds at your feeders this winter.

2010–11 *FeederWatch season statistics*

15,843 participants
115,313 checklists submitted
6,371,873 birds reported



Dark-eyed Junco by Brandon Green.
Cover photo of Western Scrub-Jay by Kathie Johnston.

Focus on Citizen Science is a publication highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This issue, *Winter Bird Highlights 2011*, 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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Celebrating our 25th season!

It is hard to believe that the 25th season of Project FeederWatch is upon us. In 1987, the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey was expanded to create Project FeederWatch and encompass all states and provinces as a wonderfully successful international partnership involving Long Point Bird Observatory (now Bird Studies Canada) and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Approximately 15,000 people make the project possible each season, and more than 100 participants have been with us each year since 1987. Thanks to the information submitted, we've learned an incredible amount about irruptive migrations, range shifts, invasive species, and population trends. Twenty-one (and counting!) scientific publications have focused on FeederWatch data, and the program has become a prime example



of a successful citizen science partnership linking the public with scientists. Thank you for being a part of FeederWatch and for spreading the word about our 25th season. The more people we have sharing observations from their own feeders, the more we can all learn about the birds we love to watch.

FeederWatch Cam migrates to Canada

At a time of the year when many birds are heading south, this past winter the FeederWatch Cam successfully migrated *north* from Colorado to Canada. For the past two years, the FeederWatch Cam was exceptionally well maintained by David Smith and Shanna Rendon in Grand Junction, Colorado. The cam featured streaming images of Gambel's Quail, Dark-eyed Juncos, House Finches, and many more birds common to the region. The cam's new home is in Manitouwadge, Ontario, within the boreal forest, just north of Lake Superior in

northern Ontario. Tammie Haché, the new cam host, is eager to share her birds with the world and is streaming views of northern finches including redpolls, Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks, and Pine Grosbeaks. You can check out the live video stream to view the latest activity at the feeders by clicking the "Live Cam" button on the FeederWatch home page. Or you can login to post a comment or question.

Below: The FeederWatch Cam points to a platform feeder with Pine Siskins and Purple Finches in Ontario.

TAMMIE HACHÉ



Staff updates

After three years as a FeederWatch project assistant, Genna Knight has moved on to tackle new adventures, including caring for two young children. Among her substantial contributions to the project, she coordinated the first FeederWatch Cam hosted by a project participant, and she developed our popular online forum. We miss Genna and wish her all the best in her new pursuits.

Ben Zuckerberg also recently left the FeederWatch team for a faculty position at the University of Wisconsin. Ben came to the Lab of Ornithology in 2009 as a post-doctoral research associate and successfully published several scientific papers with FeederWatch

data. Fortunately, Ben will continue to analyze FeederWatch data from Wisconsin, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration.

This summer we welcomed Susan Newman as our new project assistant. Susan (pictured at left) recently graduated from New York University with a master's degree in Environmental Conservation Education. She comes with experience teaching biology at the American Museum of Natural

History in New York City and as a naturalist at The Wild Center in the Adirondack Mountains. We are excited to have Susan on the FeederWatch team. She will be leading our social networking efforts, helping redesign the FeederWatch website, and assisting U.S.-based participants with questions about the project.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY SUSAN NEWMAN



DAVID SMITH

Social networking, Pinyon Jay style.

Join the FeederWatch social scene

Would you like more news and updates from Project FeederWatch and fellow participants? There are several ways to get the latest seeds of information and give us your feedback as well. “Like” us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter (@FeederWatch), or visit www.projectfeederwatch.wordpress.com to read our blog, get the latest project updates, and interact with other FeederWatchers. Project participants can also head over to our exclusive web forum by following the link in the Data Entry section of our website. In the forum you can discover what other FeederWatchers are doing and share questions, stories, and photos.

“To be able to share my experiences with a group of individuals on the forum who not only match my excitement and enthusiasm but are also more than willing to share in their knowledge means a great deal to me. Thank you, FeederWatch, for providing me with this home away from home.”

Nicole Hoekstra, Gastonia, North Carolina



NICK WHELAN

“If you’re lucky enough to have property attractive to wildlife, you’re going to attract wildlife.”

*Nick Whelan,
Corte Madera, California*

Above: A gray fox certainly seems to find FeederWatcher Nick Whelan’s property attractive. After enjoying its fill of seed, the fox had a drink (“Bird seed must be a bit dry,” Nick points out,) and took a nap in Nick’s yard. **Right:** Michael Butler of Marathon, Ontario, gets the message that it’s time to take down his feeders for the warmer months—or something else will!



MICHAEL BUTLER

Which species is it?

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

FeederWatch participants sometimes see birds at their feeders that they don't recognize, and if they are able to get a photo, they often send it to FeederWatch staff for identification help. Two birds that seem to frequently confuse participants are the female Brown-headed Cowbird and the female Red-winged Blackbird. Both are fairly nondescript and lack the field marks that make the male individuals of these species fairly easy to recognize. When these species visit feeders in mixed flocks of males and females, they can be identified by association. But when only females appear, they can be difficult to identify. 📌

Female Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)

- Plain, nondescript, brown bird
- Larger than most sparrows (7.5" long)
- Conical, stout bill
- Pale beige throat contrasts with darker brown elsewhere
- Dark eye
- May show faint streaking on breast and wings
- Brown-colored overall in the East and gray-colored in the West



JAY PAREDES

Female Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

- Heavy brown streaking on breast and back
- Significantly larger than sparrows (8.75" long)
- Looks like a large sparrow, but with a longer, narrow, pointed bill
- Wings are more rufous-colored than rest of bird
- Buffy tan throat, eyebrow, and stripe on side of throat
- Dark eye



CLEBER FERREIRA

Research updates

Recent scientific publications based on FeederWatch data include a paper in the *Journal of Animal Ecology* titled, "Climatic constraints on wintering bird distributions are modified by urbanization and weather." Focusing on 18 bird species and data from more than 3,000 FeederWatch sites, Cornell researchers found that the average minimum temperature is an important factor influencing bird distributions. Further, birds are more likely to visit feeders when weather conditions deteriorate. These relationships are modified by urbanization, however, with some species doing better in urban areas than others.

Cornell University Press is about to print a book called *Citizen Science* that features a chapter highlighting the FeederWatch experience. FeederWatch is used as an example of a long-term project that has successfully engaged thousands of participants from across the continent. The chapter is titled, "From backyard observations to continent-wide trends: Lessons from the first 22 years of Project FeederWatch."

Keep an eye on the "Research News" section of the FeederWatch blog for the latest results from FeederWatch analyses and for summaries of recent scientific discoveries about our feeder birds.



High counts at feeders in Canada

BY KERRIE WILCOX, BIRD STUDIES CANADA

EVENING GROSBEAKS BY TUCKER INNES

Rather than focusing on trends this year, I thought it would be fun to highlight some of the exceptionally high feeder counts that were reported from across Canada. Some high counts really caught our eye and required follow-up documentation. It's interesting to learn the details of these counts. High counts can occur for many reasons including having ideal habitat conditions and maintaining a large number of feeders. Whatever the reason, some high counts are truly exceptional!

House Sparrows—Niagara, Ontario

When Cathy Giancarlo submitted a count of 385 House Sparrows at her feeder, her report was automatically flagged by the data entry system and a note was sent to her requesting more information about her sighting. FeederWatch uses automated filters that compare observations with typical counts for the reporting month and region. If a count exceeds the expected total, the observer is asked to confirm. The flagging system for Cathy's location in Niagara, Ontario, expects participants to see fewer than 83 House Sparrows. Cathy wrote, "I wish there were only 83 House Sparrows at my feeders at one time." She came up with her own strategy for counting them—she took pictures of three different areas of her yard and then counted all of the House Sparrows on her computer screen. Great idea, Cathy!

Snow Buntings—Camp Morton, Manitoba

When I received Bill Maciejko's data in the mail, the

note attached really caught my attention. It read, "Please enter the Snow Bunting counts by hand—there is only space for two digits." On 7 of his FeederWatch counts he reported more than 400 Snow Buntings! His peak count of 800 Snow Buntings was on January 1. He noted that at their peak, each day the buntings were consuming 50 to 60 pounds of white millet, which he spread on the snow!

Evening Grosbeaks—British Columbia

FeederWatch data have documented sharp declines in Evening Grosbeak populations over the past two decades for unknown reasons, so it was refreshing to hear from Tucker Innes of South Hazelton, British Columbia. And we particularly enjoyed his clever counting strategy. Tucker wrote, "I just wanted to send in a couple pictures of the daily invasion of grosbeaks we have here. I know they're not as widespread as they used to be, but up here the numbers are huge. They line up on the string of seeds I place on the deck (long and skinny makes it easier for me to count). It's deafening outside when they're all here. And we fly through seed like mad. We've had days with close to 200 grosbeaks."

Redpolls—Upper Woodstock, New Brunswick

Irruptive finches were in "invasion mode" in the east during 2010–11. Common Redpolls and a fair sprinkling of Hoary Redpolls showed increases compared to the winter of 2009–10. New Brunswick was

"We now have a total of 26 feeders up and yes, it gets busy. When we have more than 100 birds at a time, you can practically watch the nyjer level go down!"

Doris Bercarich, Toronto, Ontario

a hotspot—more than 95% of feeders in the province were visited by Common Redpolls. FeederWatcher Judith Anderson wrote, “On March 14 we were treated to an unusually large number of Common Redpolls. We estimated more than 1,000. I have never seen so many birds! We put out extra nyjer feed everywhere on the snow, and the feeders required filling twice a day.” Judith went through a 20 kg bag of nyjer feed in one week during this period! The Anderson property is on the banks of the Saint John River and has quite a diversified habitat.

Bald Eagles—Antigonish, Nova Scotia

When I first started reviewing records for FeederWatch in 2005–06, I was shocked by the high counts of Bald Eagles at a feeder in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. I thought that counts were being added together or that flybys were being counted. I was surprised to learn that Randy Lauff was feeding the eagles and that he actually did have 5 Bald Eagles (and 30 Common Ravens) at his feeding station. Randy, an ornithologist at St. Francis Xavier University, attracts a number of species including ravens, eagles, and crows to his carrion station. His FeederWatch site includes a small yard, large garden, small orchard, and intervening trees. Randy starts putting out carcasses from local trappers or roadkill in November after the bears are no longer active, and he stops feeding before the end of March when the bears come out of hibernation.

Rusty Blackbirds—Walsingham, Ontario

Rusty Blackbirds are perhaps the least well known of the North American blackbirds. They breed north of the tree line in wet forests of Alaska, Canada, and the northeastern United States. No other blackbird breeds that far north. They winter locally and irregu-



HELENA GARCIA

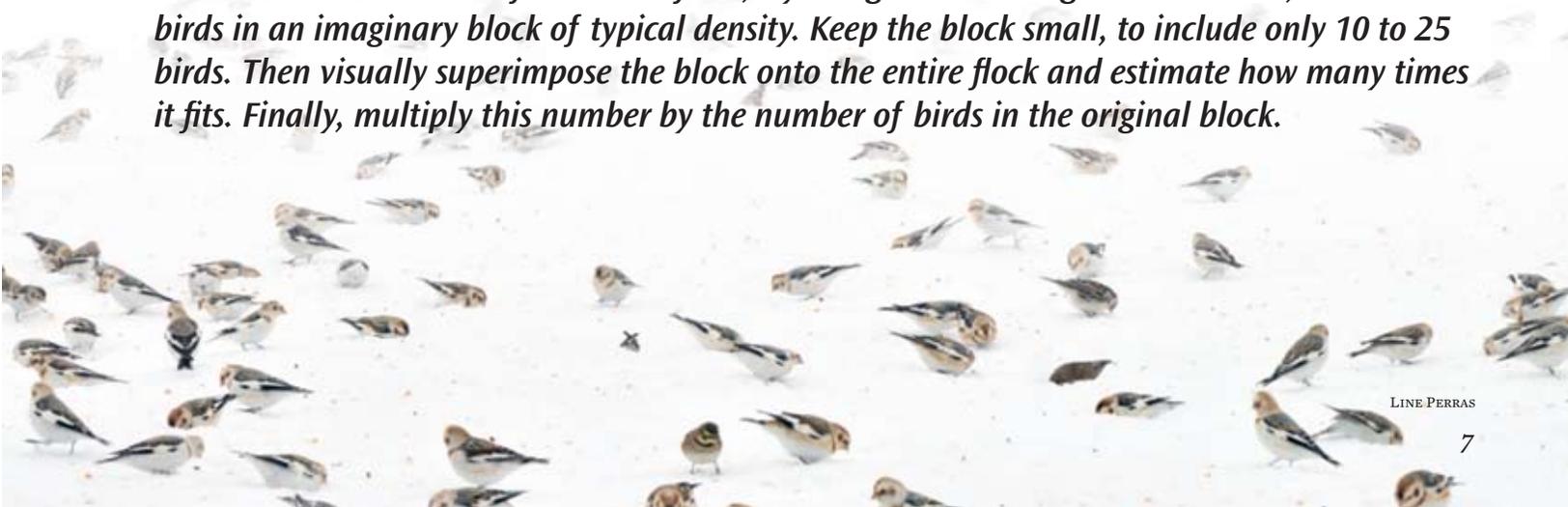
larly in southern Ontario, but they are so rarely seen that they do not appear on the standard checklist for the province. As such, a count of 70 Rusty Blackbirds was indeed a surprise. On February 3, Diane Salter, of Walsingham, Ontario wrote, “I’ve had a flock of Rusty Blackbirds at my feeders the last 3 days. I expect the deep covering of snow has forced them to feeders.” Then on February 16, “This morning there were over 70 Rusty Blackbirds at my feeders. They’re very jumpy.”

If you submit an exceptionally high count, please expect a message from us—we want to hear more about it!

Opposite page: Spreading seed in a long line on his deck allows Tucker Innes to count the grosbeaks more easily. **Above:** Common Redpolls visited feeders in large flocks at many locations in eastern Canada during the winter of 2010–11. **Below:** Line Perras of Russell, Ontario, hosted large flocks of Snow Buntings—431 on one count!

Counting A Large Flock

It can be very difficult to count large flocks of birds, especially when they keep moving around. To estimate the number of birds in a flock, try using the “blocking” method. First, count the birds in an imaginary block of typical density. Keep the block small, to include only 10 to 25 birds. Then visually superimpose the block onto the entire flock and estimate how many times it fits. Finally, multiply this number by the number of birds in the original block.



LINE PERRAS

Regional roundup

Trends and highlights from the 2010–11 FeederWatch season

BY DAVID BONTER,
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

The 2010–11 FeederWatch season delivered many species in record numbers to the Southeast, and woodpeckers made a strong showing in the center of the continent. Counts were generally lower than expected in much of the Southwest. A movement of redpolls, siskins, and chickadees in the northeastern part of North America suggested that seed crops were poor heading into the winter. More details can be found in the regional summaries that follow.

Top-25 lists are based on the percentage of FeederWatch locations in the region that hosted each species at least once between November 2010 and April 2011. To see Top-25 lists for each state and province, visit the Explore Data section of the FeederWatch website.



RANDY LAUFF

Above: A Black Vulture wandered into Randy Lauff's garden shed in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Rare bird records from the province reveal fewer than 30 confirmed observations of this species in Nova Scotia. **Below:** Anna's Hummingbirds are enjoyed by FeederWatchers in the West each winter, with reports increasing in the Pacific Northwest. This individual danced with a honey bee near Sam Wilson's feeders in Scottsdale, Arizona.

SAM WILSON



Continental Top 10: 1987–2011*

1. Dark-eyed Junco
2. Downy Woodpecker
3. Black-capped/Carolina Chickadee
4. House Finch
5. American Goldfinch
6. Mourning Dove
7. American Robin
8. American Crow
9. House Sparrow
10. European Starling

* Based on the percentage of all FeederWatch sites reporting these species.

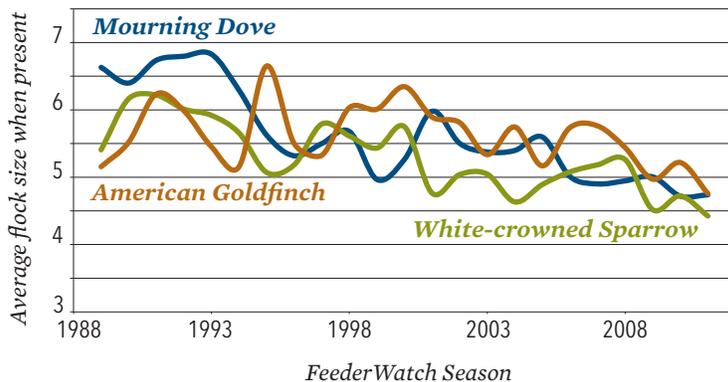


Southwest & California Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 782 SITES REPORTING

Rank	2010-11		Percentage of Sites	
	Rank	Average	2010-11	Average
1	1	House Finch	91	89
2	2	Dark-eyed Junco	75	81
3	4	Mourning Dove	71	64
4	4	Western Scrub-Jay	60	62
5	6	House Sparrow	57	59
6	5	White-crowned Sparrow	57	59
7	19	Lesser Goldfinch	56	35
8	10	American Goldfinch	52	48
9	9	Northern Flicker	51	48
10	8	American Robin	51	53
11	10	Anna's Hummingbird	47	49
12	12	Spotted Towhee	41	40
13	12	Pine Siskin	38	42
14	26	American Crow	35	24
15	23	Downy Woodpecker	35	26
16	18	White-breasted Nuthatch	35	29
17	14	California Towhee	33	40
18	28	Cooper's Hawk	33	22
19	15	European Starling	32	33
20	19	"Plain" Titmouse*	31	29
21	34	Eurasian Collared-Dove	31	22
22	24	Yellow-rumped Warbler	29	24
23	24	Mountain Chickadee	29	25
24	21	Sharp-shinned Hawk	28	27
25	30	Bushtit	27	21

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



Graph: Average flock sizes for a number of common species were at or near record lows in 2010-11: White-crowned Sparrow (green), American Goldfinch (brown), and Mourning Dove (blue). **Photo:** One in four FeederWatchers in the region hosted Steller's Jay last season.

The common feeder species in the region were reported at as many locations as in the past, but average flock sizes were down for many species. House Finches were once again seen at more locations than any other species, but the average maximum flock size of 6.6 birds was the lowest in FeederWatch history. The size of Bushtit flocks dropped to 5.8 birds, one less bird, on average, than is typically seen for this species. Likewise, the average maximum flock sizes for White-crowned Sparrow and American Goldfinch were the lowest on record, while Dark-eyed Junco and Mourning Dove flocks dipped to near-record lows. It was another below-average year for Pine Siskins with fewer than 40% of locations reporting this finch.

On the upside, Downy Woodpeckers were seen at more FeederWatch locations last winter than in any previous season. Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to invade the Southwest, reaching the Top 25 for the first time. Collared-Doves were reported by 31% of FeederWatch participants in the region, up from 26% in 2009-10.

Notable rare bird reports included two birds in Colorado: a Bullock's Oriole (it should have been in Mexico at that time of the year) and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (west of the typical range for this species). Surprising finds in Arizona included an out-of-range Varied Thrush and a Harris's Sparrow. A Clay-colored Sparrow in California was also unexpected.



PAM KOCH

Pine Warblers were reported at more locations in the South than ever, with 43% of sites reporting this species, well exceeding the long-term average of 28%. A banner season was recorded for Eastern Phoebe, with this flycatcher seen at 1 in 4 FeederWatch sites. More FeederWatchers reported Eastern Bluebirds and Ruby-crowned Kinglets last winter than ever before. All of these species were seen taking advantage of suet or mealworms provided by happy observers.

Common Grackles continued to be seen by fewer FeederWatchers, dropping to the lowest number in the history of the project and at risk of falling out of the Top 25. Northern Flickers experienced an off year, with the lowest percentage of sites reporting this woodpecker and the smallest flock sizes on record.

Non-native birds did not make a strong showing during the 2010–11 season, with European Starling reported at fewer locations (27%) and falling to their lowest ranking (#32) in FeederWatch history. House Sparrows also dropped out of the Top 25 for only the third time, reported at fewer than 37% of sites.

Purple Finches returned to the region in decent numbers and climbed back into the Top 25 after staying to the north over the previous two winter seasons. A movement of Pine Siskins made its way into the region, with 36% of sites reporting this finch, an increase from 19% of sites in 2009–10. Other finches did not fare as well. Average maximum House Finch flock sizes dropped to only 3.4 birds (compared with 9 birds in the early 1990s), and American Goldfinch flock sizes were the lowest on record with 2 fewer birds per flock than the long-term average.

Notable rare bird reports included a Western Tanager in Williamsburg, Virginia, and a Broad-billed Hummingbird in Oviedo, Florida.

Southeast & South-Central Regions



TOP-25 LIST: 1,091 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2010–11	Average		2010–11	Average
1	1	Northern Cardinal	98	97
2	2	Mourning Dove	89	90
3	5	Carolina Chickadee	89	80
4	4	American Goldfinch	85	84
5	7	Carolina Wren	82	75
6	5	Tufted Titmouse	80	83
7	4	Blue Jay	79	83
8	11	House Finch	75	66
9	8	Red-bellied Woodpecker	75	74
10	12	Northern Mockingbird	69	61
11	12	Downy Woodpecker	68	61
12	10	Dark-eyed Junco	64	66
13	13	American Robin	62	59
14	13	White-throated Sparrow	54	55
15	18	Chipping Sparrow	53	43
16	22	Yellow-rumped Warbler	49	37
17	25	Eastern Bluebird	48	34
18	18	Brown-headed Cowbird	47	44
19	20	Red-winged Blackbird	47	42
20	22	American Crow	45	37
21	29	Pine Warbler	43	28
22	22	White-breasted Nuthatch	43	39
23	22	Purple Finch	41	40
24	22	Brown Thrasher	40	39
25	15	Common Grackle	40	50

Right: A young male Rufous Hummingbird banded in Tallahassee, Florida, was an unexpected highlight of the season for FeederWatcher Joanne Harrington.



FRED DIETRICH



Pacific Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 925 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2010-11	Average		2010-11	Average
1	1	Dark-eyed Junco	91	88
2	5	Northern Flicker	81	67
3	2	Black-capped Chickadee	79	80
4	4	House Finch	73	71
5	8	Red-breasted Nuthatch	68	56
6	7	American Robin	68	59
7	10	Downy Woodpecker	65	54
8	9	Song Sparrow	59	54
9	6	Pine Siskin	59	62
10	11	Steller's Jay	58	52
11	9	Spotted Towhee	58	54
12	11	European Starling	53	51
13	11	House Sparrow	53	52
14	15	Varied Thrush	52	40
15	15	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	48	42
16	17	American Goldfinch	40	34
17	19	American Crow	39	30
18	37	Anna's Hummingbird	36	16
19	18	Hairy Woodpecker	34	30
20	26	Bushtit	33	21
21	21	Fox Sparrow	33	27
22	20	Red-winged Blackbird	30	27
23	28	Mourning Dove	28	20
24	25	Evening Grosbeak	28	26
25	27	Golden-crowned Sparrow	28	20

Last winter was memorable for many FeederWatchers in the region as reports of several common feeder birds reached all-time records. Northern Flickers were seen at more sites than ever before, as were Red-breasted Nuthatches (seen at 110 more locations than the long-term average). Downy Woodpeckers continued a slow, steady increase, seen at more than 65% of locations for the first time in FeederWatch history. Anna's Hummingbirds were reported by 36% of FeederWatchers last winter, continuing the upward trend starting at approximately 5% of sites in the early 1990s. Song Sparrows, Steller's Jays, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, and Red-winged Blackbirds were all seen at a near-record percentage of FeederWatch locations in 2010-11. Varied Thrush recovered from their poorest season on record in 2009-10, moving up 8 ranking positions and seen at twice as many sites in 2010-11 than in the previous winter. Bushtit numbers were far better than in regions to the south, seen at more sites than ever in above-average flock sizes.

The positive news was not universal, however, as American Robin flock sizes dropped to the lowest on record. It was a sub-par year for Pine Siskins, appearing at only 59% of sites and with flock sizes that were the second lowest on record (average 5 birds). Purple Finches dropped out of the Top 25 (to #31), and Common Redpolls were relatively difficult to find, reported by only 8% of FeederWatchers in the region (in contrast to the abundance in northeastern North America).

Rare bird highlights from the region included a Bullock's Oriole lingering in Washington, a wayward Indigo Bunting in Idaho, and a Harris's Sparrow in British Columbia. Most unexpected, however, was an American Redstart in Eugene, Oregon. This warbler typically breeds in eastern North America and winters in the tropics.



Left: An American Redstart is rarely seen near feeders anywhere in North America in winter. Seeing this species in Oregon was truly unexpected.

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



Chickadees, considered by most to be resident birds, do occasionally undertake large-scale movements that are poorly understood. Bird banding stations in the Northeast recorded a large movement of Black-capped Chickadees late last fall. The reasons for these movements may be related to either a poor food supply (seed crop) or exceptional reproductive success (meaning that there is not enough space in the northern forests for all of the chickadees). Regardless of the cause, chickadees were seen by more FeederWatchers in the region last winter than ever before.

Other species appearing with better than average frequency were Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, and Northern Cardinal, all seen at a near-record high percentage of locations. Red-bellied Woodpeckers were reported from more locations than ever before, nearly doubling the percentage of sites hosting this species when FeederWatch began. Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk were also seen in numbers above the long-term averages.

Common Grackle numbers appear stable in the northeastern quadrant of North America, in contrast to declining numbers in the South. Non-native species, on the other hand, appear to be on the decline, with House Sparrow average flock sizes dropping to 6.7 birds (about 1/3 fewer birds than when FeederWatch began), and Rock Pigeons were reported from the lowest percentage of sites ever.

It was an average irruption year for Common Redpolls—29% of locations reporting redpolls was a major change over the 3% of sites reporting in 2009–10. The average redpoll flock was 10 birds, with several FeederWatchers

TOP-25 LIST: 5,905 SITES REPORTING

Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
2010–11	Average		2010–11	Average
1	1	Chickadee*	98	96
2	3	Dark-eyed Junco	92	90
3	2	Mourning Dove	92	92
4	5	Downy Woodpecker	91	87
5	4	Blue Jay	90	90
6	7	American Goldfinch	90	84
7	6	Northern Cardinal	87	84
8	8	White-breasted Nuthatch	85	77
9	9	House Finch	72	76
10	11	Tufted Titmouse	67	63
11	15	Hairy Woodpecker	65	53
12	17	Red-bellied Woodpecker	65	50
13	10	European Starling	63	68
14	17	American Robin	62	49
15	12	House Sparrow	61	64
16	16	American Crow	59	52
17	15	Common Grackle	51	52
18	17	Song Sparrow	51	47
19	20	White-throated Sparrow	47	42
20	20	Red-winged Blackbird	45	42
21	23	Carolina Wren	43	33
22	23	Red-breasted Nuthatch	41	33
23	22	American Tree Sparrow	40	37
24	22	Brown-headed Cowbird	34	35
25	30	Cooper's Hawk	32	18

* Combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee.

hosting flocks of more than 100 birds. Pine Siskins also moved into the region early in the fall, many passing through the north and spending the bulk of the winter in the southern parts of the region.



CAROLINA CHICKADEE BY MICHELLE ISING BLACK

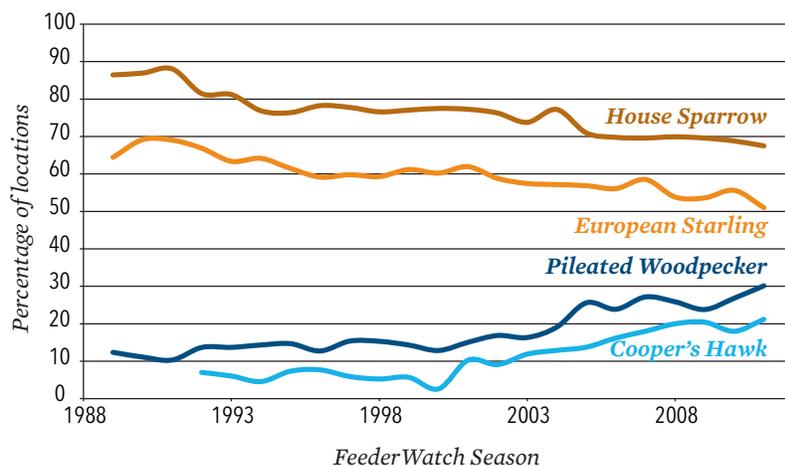


North-Central & Mid-Central Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 637 SITES REPORTING

Rank	Rank		Species	Percentage of Sites	
	2010-11	Average		2010-11	Average
1	1		Chickadee*	95	94
2	3		Downy Woodpecker	91	89
3	3		Blue Jay	88	88
4	3		Dark-eyed Junco	86	90
5	7		White-breasted Nuthatch	82	74
6	6		American Goldfinch	78	77
7	10		Hairy Woodpecker	72	64
8	8		Northern Cardinal	70	71
9	11		House Finch	68	62
10	6		House Sparrow	68	76
11	12		Red-bellied Woodpecker	63	55
12	13		American Robin	60	53
13	14		Mourning Dove	59	53
14	11		European Starling	51	60
15	16		American Crow	47	44
16	18		Northern Flicker	40	36
17	17		Purple Finch	40	40
18	16		Common Grackle	38	44
19	21		Pine Siskin	37	34
20	21		Red-winged Blackbird	34	30
21	21		Red-breasted Nuthatch	34	32
22	28		Pileated Woodpecker	30	18
23	22		American Tree Sparrow	28	28
24	21		Tufted Titmouse	28	30
25	24		White-throated Sparrow	26	24

* Combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee



Either Carolina Chickadees or Black-capped Chickadees were reported at 95% of locations in the region last winter, the highest number since 1999. With above-average flock sizes recorded as well, chickadees retook the #1 spot on the regional list. It was also a good year for woodpeckers in the region. Hairy Woodpeckers were seen at more FeederWatch locations than ever before with the greatest mean flock size on record (1.5 birds). Pileated Woodpeckers continued to increase, seen at 30% of sites, which is more than double the numbers reported when FeederWatch began in 1987.

Pine Siskins re-entered the Top 25 after an off year in 2009-10. Siskins visited 37% of FeederWatch sites in the region, making for an average irruption year. Common Redpolls were also seen at 20% of locations in the region, mostly in Manitoba and Minnesota.

Cooper's Hawks were seen at more sites than ever (20%), and reports of Sharp-shinned Hawks were above average as well. As in other regions, the slow decline in the abundance of House Sparrows continues in the central regions, with House Sparrows seen at 68% of sites today compared with 87% when FeederWatch began. Likewise, European Starlings were reported at 51% of sites in 2010-11, a decline from approximately 65% of sites during the early years of the project.

Unexpected sightings during the 2010-11 season included a Summer Tanager seen in Nebraska when it should have been wintering in Central or South America. A Brown Thrasher lingered in Manitoba later into the winter than expected, and a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch in Creighton, Saskatchewan, was farther northeast than usual. A cold Gray Catbird was also recorded attempting to brave the winter in Iowa.

Graph: House Sparrows and European Starlings are on the decline while Cooper's Hawks and Pileated Woodpeckers are becoming more common in the region in winter.

Alaska & Northern Canada



Corvids were common at FeederWatch locations in Alaska and northern Canada last winter, with Black-billed Magpies being seen at more sites than usual, bringing this species to #2 on the regional list for the first time. Gray Jay and Steller's Jay reports were also above long-term averages. Reports of Dark-eyed Juncos increased, with the species seen by more participants in 2010-11 than in any season since 1992 despite the below-average flock sizes. Half of the FeederWatch locations hosted Pine Grosbeaks, a major improvement over the previous season when less than 1/3 of sites hosted this large finch. Reports of the smaller Pine Siskin are highly variable, seen at between 12% to 56% of sites over the history of FeederWatch. Siskins appeared at 23% of sites in 2010-11 in relatively small flocks (average 9.3 birds compared to the long-

TOP-10 LIST: 48 SITES REPORTING

Rank			Percentage of Sites	
2010-11	Average	Species	2010-11	Average
1	1	Black-capped Chickadee	77	83
2	5	Black-billed Magpie	60	55
3	2	Common Redpoll	56	78
4	9	Dark-eyed Junco	56	43
5	5	Boreal Chickadee	56	57
6	6	Downy Woodpecker	54	52
7	8	Hairy Woodpecker	52	49
8	5	Pine Grosbeak	50	58
9	11	Common Raven	46	36
10	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	46	50

term average of 15.8 birds). The rare bird highlight of the season was the return in early November of a Rustic Bunting (an Asian species) to a FeederWatch site in Ketchikan, Alaska. Because individuals of many species tend to be faithful to their wintering locations, this bird was possibly one of the two individuals seen at the same location in 2009-10.



FRED JORDAN

This Lewis's Woodpecker was one of the truly unexpected finds of the 2010-11 season. Native to the open forests of the West, this individual wintered at the feeders of Fred and Ellie Jordan in western New York. It was only the fifth confirmed record of the species in the state.

Hawaii

FeederWatchers in Hawaii were able to sample species from around the globe in their own backyards. North American species (House Finch, Northern Cardinal) joined birds from South America (Saffron Finch, Red-crested Cardinal, Yellow-billed Cardinal), Africa (Common Waxbill), Europe (House Sparrow), and Asia (Zebra Dove, Common Myna, Japanese White-eye, Java Sparrow, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Red-billed Leiothrix, Gray Francolin, and White-rumped Shama) at the two FeederWatch locations in the state. More observers are needed to help us track the spread of non-native birds across the islands. Visitors to Hawaii are encouraged to spread the word about FeederWatch!

RED-CRESTED CARDINAL BY MICHAEL STUBBLEFIELD



Attracting birds naturally

BY SUSAN NEWMAN, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

FeederWatchers do their best to attract birds to their feeders, and some do much more than put out seed and suet. Many FeederWatch participants try to make their yards as attractive as possible to birds and other wildlife through landscaping. They plant thick foliage and establish brush piles for shelter, provide water for birds to bathe in, and plant a wide variety of native plants to keep birds fed and sheltered year-round.

Planting native vegetation—and therefore helping to combat habitat loss—is perhaps the best way to improve the environment and attract birds. Native plants that provide berries, nuts, and seeds throughout the year are great for attracting birds and ensuring that they have plenty of food even after the summer is over. For instance, crabapple trees fruit in the fall, but their fruit often lasts through the winter, attracting thrushes, waxwings, Pine Grosbeaks, and more. Other plants, such as grasses that have been allowed to go to seed, will also provide winter food. Native



LESLIE CLAPP

A Baltimore Oriole enjoys frosty berries in a bird-friendly yard.

plants provide places for nests and shelter, and attract insects that supply food for some birds.

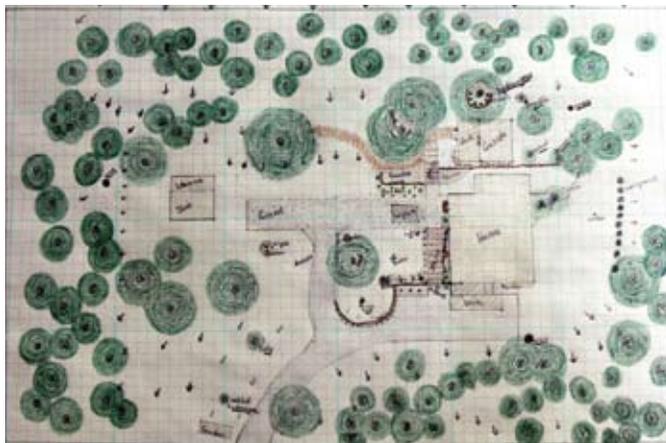
Establishing a wildlife-friendly landscape may be hard work at first. It is “worth it when we see all the birds and critters benefit from all the plantings,” says FeederWatcher Sarah Wirth. She has a yard full of vegetation—grasses, flowering plants, and fruiting trees—planted specifically to attract birds. Many FeederWatchers, including Sarah, have put so much effort into their feeder sites that their yards are certified as wildlife habitats by

the National Wildlife Federation.

Even if you aren’t able to establish a habitat of native plants, you may be able to attract birds through landscaping in other ways. Kristie Kohn of Medford, Wisconsin, says, “Just having a vegetable garden is a great way to attract all kinds of birds. The past few years, I have seen Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Chipping Sparrows, American Robins, House Finches, American Goldfinches, Mourning Doves—we’ve even had ducks come visit the vegetable garden.”

Some FeederWatchers are lucky to live near natural areas, but others have to work much harder to make their yards wildlife friendly. Yet even participants who live in more urban areas can take steps to make their yards better for the birds. Mary Fusco of Bridgeton, New Jersey, says that her small suburban yard is mostly paved but she is in the process of slowly landscaping with shade perennials and bulbs. FeederWatchers who turn their urban and suburban yards into green oases are vital to birds and other wildlife that live in these areas or pass through during migration. Well-landscaped yards play an important role in creating effective wildlife corridors and networks through developed areas.

Scientific studies suggest that landscaping your yard isn’t just for the birds. Naturally-landscaped yards make you and your neighbors happier. In addition, natively-landscaped yards increase the diversity of bird species found in the area, and higher bird diversity is connected to happier neighborhoods.



MARILYN BOWES

FeederWatcher Marilyn Bowes mapped out a new landscape designed to attract birds to her yard.

See the Lab’s *Birding Basics* page on landscaping for more information on what to plant in your yard at www.allaboutbirds.org

For more information about the research mentioned here, visit the FeederWatch blog.



Watch for banded birds

Crossbill populations decline but are more common at feeders

BY CRAIG BENKMAN, UNIV. OF WYOMING

Dr. Craig Benkman, professor and the Robert B. Berry Chair of Ecology at the University of Wyoming and a world expert on crossbills, recently analyzed FeederWatch data to examine trends in feeder use by these unique birds. He highlighted FeederWatch in plenary addresses at the conferences of the Association of Field Ornithologists in 2010 and the American Ornithologists' Union in 2011. Below Dr. Benkman summarizes his work and requests your help.

We have been banding a resident population of Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) in southern Idaho since the late 1990s. We refer to this crossbill as the “South Hills crossbill” because a large majority of this crossbill’s population occurs in the South Hills in Idaho. We distinguish the South Hills crossbill by its bill and body size and its unique calls and songs. The South Hills crossbill produces “Type 9” call notes, one of 10 Red Crossbill call types in North America. Unlike most crossbills, these crossbills are highly sedentary. We have banded more than 3,000 South Hills crossbills, and we recapture them year after year in the same nets. None have been found outside of the 70 square kilometers of lodgepole pine forest in the South Hills and the nearby Albion Mountains.

Less than five percent of the crossbills we capture have vocalizations of other call types. Although you are unlikely to see one of our banded South Hills crossbills away from the South Hills and Albion Mountains,

More information about Dr. Benkman’s research can be found on his website:

www.uwyo.edu/benkman/people.html

To report any banded bird, go to

www.reportband.gov

there is a chance that you might see an individual of one of the other call types that we have banded. Earlier this summer one of the “Type 2” crossbills that we color banded in 2009 showed up 400 miles to the east at a bird feeder on the edge of the pine forest at the base of Casper Mountain in Wyoming. Fortunately, the observer, Art Van Rensselaer, took photographs so we could identify the individual. (We need to see both legs and the direction the mandibles cross.)

My analyses of Feederwatch data for the West indicate that crossbills have increased 20 fold at feeders over the last 20 years. This might be surprising as crossbills are declining. Based on the Breeding Bird Survey, Red Crossbills have declined by more than two percent per year since 1980. Why has there been an increase at feeders while the population has declined?

Unfortunately, there may be a “good” reason. My hunch is that, with increasing temperatures, conifers are prematurely shedding the seeds from their cones. Since 1980, we have been experiencing increasingly warm conditions, which causes the seeds to fall from the cones earlier, making them unavailable to the crossbills. This explains both the decline in crossbills since 1980 (when temperatures began to increase) and the increasing numbers of crossbills at feeders in late winter and spring. Sadly, the South Hills crossbill is declining even more rapidly than other crossbills. It declined by more than 60% between 2003 and 2008, and the decline has continued.

I expect crossbills to continue to decline with increasing temperatures and that an increasing proportion of those surviving will visit feeders. Eventually, crossbills should decline at feeders, too. But we won’t know without FeederWatch data. Until they do, you have opportunities to see what Theodore Roosevelt called “treasures of such importance.” And please, if you see a color-banded crossbill, take photographs and send them to me! We’d like to know which crossbill you saw visiting your feeder.

ART VAN RENNELAER



This banded Red Crossbill was photographed 400 miles from the original capture location, providing valuable information about movements by the species.

