

2014–15 Project FeederWatch

End-of-Season News Note

Thank you for another successful FeederWatch season! See inside this letter for new information about House Finch eye disease, as well as additional project news. As we begin to analyze the data from the 28th 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. Further, postage costs are greatly reduced if you renew early so that we may send your research kit via bulk mail in September. We are doing our best to limit expenses.

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. Note that you must renew by mail or phone to order paper data forms.

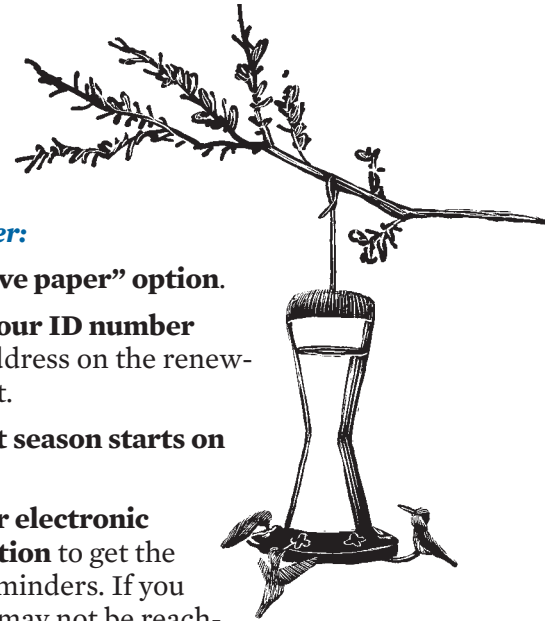
Save paper—skip the kit

All renewing participants receive a kit unless you choose the option to save paper and skip the kit. If you would like to receive a calendar and a print

version of *Winter Bird Highlights*, please choose one of the kit options on the enclosed renewal coupon.

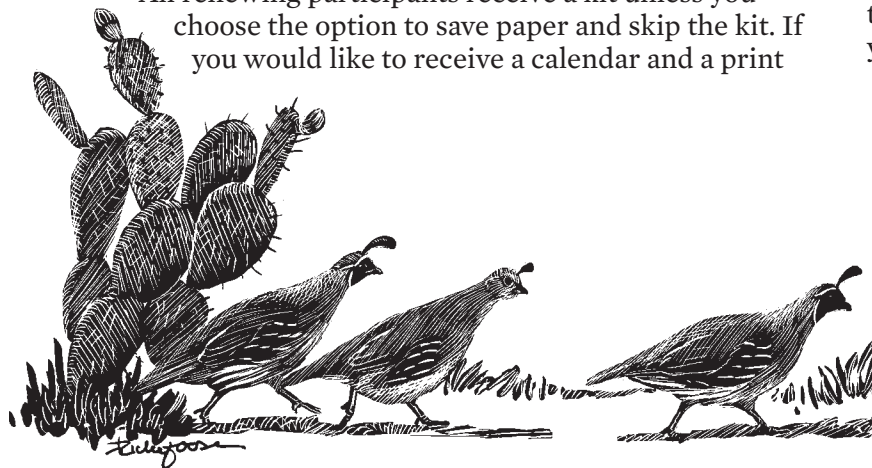
If you would like to forego the kit altogether:

- ◆ Please **select the “Save paper” option.**
- ◆ 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 14.**
- ◆ Please **maintain your electronic newsletter subscription** to get the latest updates and reminders. 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 3 marked the last day to count birds for the 2014–15 FeederWatch season. If you have already submitted your counts, thank you! If you still have counts to report, please submit your data today.



New information about House Finch eye disease

A recent study from the Cornell Lab found that the bacteria causing House Finch eye disease is present in many species, not just feeder birds. “The results were shocking,” wrote André Dhondt, director of Bird Population Studies. “More than half the bird species we tested have been exposed to the bacteria. This organism, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, is much more widespread than anyone thought, although in most species there are no signs of conjunctivitis.”

Some species that tested positive for the disease were not surprising, like American Goldfinches. However, other species that almost never show symptoms, such as Black-capped Chickadees and Tufted Titmice, also tested positive for the bacteria. The biggest surprise might be that some forest species, such as Wood Thrushes, tested positive. “How on earth do Wood Thrushes get infected with mycoplasma?” asked Dhondt. “They’re not a feeder bird at all. Everyone has always assumed that feeders play a major role in the transmission of the disease, and this study shows that’s not necessarily so.” Overall, 27 out of 53 species trapped around Ithaca, New York, and tested for the disease



House Finch with eye disease.

showed evidence of current or past infection.

House Finch eye disease first appeared in North America in 1994 when FeederWatch participants started seeing birds with swollen, runny eyes. A strain of the bacteria, usually found in poultry, was able to grow successfully in House Finches. Since it was first detected, the House Finch lineage of the bacteria has been mutating. “The organism could mutate into a form that is much more virulent among other bird species and create a new epidemic,” noted Dhondt.

The take-home message for people who feed backyard birds: keep the feeders clean. If you see sick birds, leave them alone, take down the feeders and clean them, being sure to wash

your hands thoroughly afterward. You can find more information about House Finch eye disease on our website at feederwatch.org/learn/house-finch-eye-disease/.

Dhondt, André A., Jonathan C. DeCoste, David H. Ley, and Wesley M. Hochachka (2014). Diverse wild bird host range of *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* in eastern North America. *PLOS ONE* 9(7): e103553.

FeederWatch data used in article about climate change

Project FeederWatch participants were the scientists behind a new study showing that as winter temperatures have become warmer in the Northeast over the past two decades, the community composition of birds at feeders also has changed. How has it changed? In the way that you might expect; bird communities are becoming more heavily composed of warm-adapted species, such as Chipping Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers in the Southeast and Carolina Wrens and Eastern Bluebirds in the Northeast. For example, seeing a Carolina Wren in Michigan 10 years ago was a rare event. Now it is commonplace. The study found that winter ranges have shifted approximately 70 km north every decade for these more warm-adapted species.

Scientists aren’t sure if habitat changes are contributing to the range changes in part, but they are relatively sure that warming winter temperatures play a significant role.

What happens when we suddenly have an especially cold winter, then? We have yet to find out, but with continued effort from FeederWatch participants, we will be able to put the recently collected data to good use and see how the recent cold winters have impacted populations of warm-



FeederWatch reports for Carolina Wrens from 1989 (left) and 2013 (right).

adapted species. Such data wouldn’t exist were it not for citizen scientists, and we thank you for your efforts!

Project FeederWatch visits flower shows

Flowers and birds tend to go together, and that was certainly the case at the 2015 Northwest Flower & Garden Show in Seattle, Washington, and the Philadelphia Flower Show in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. More than 60,000 people in Seattle and more than 200,000 people in Philadelphia were attracted to a bird-themed display with a two-story tall bird feeder and a birdhouse the size of a garden shed. The display featured information about chickadee communication and iPads that allowed visitors to explore FeederWatch's interactive "Common Feeder Birds" web pages, NestWatch's interactive "Right Birds, Right House" web pages, and Merlin, the Cornell Lab's identification app for smartphones. We also gave away thousands of our Common Feeder Birds posters.

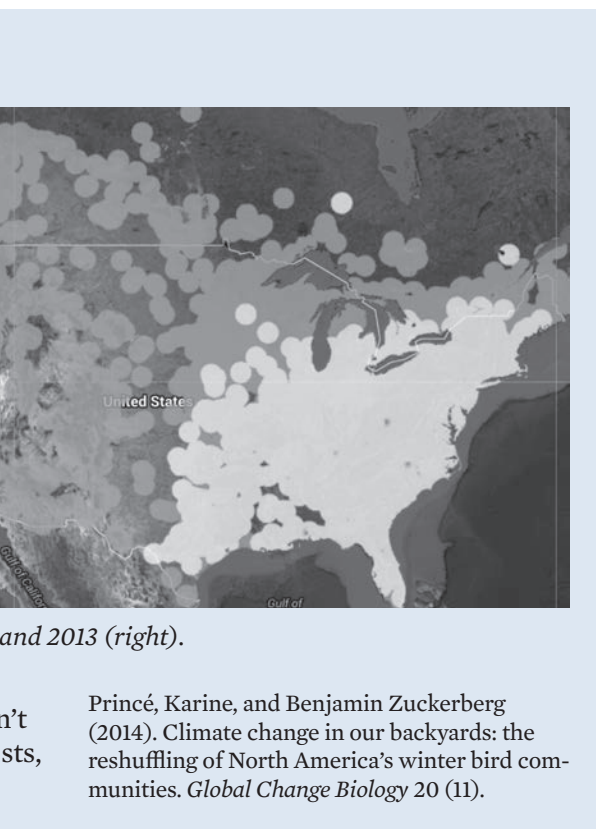
Many FeederWatchers stopped by to share stories with Cornell Lab staff members, including David Bonter, former FeederWatch project leader, and Emma Greig, current FeederWatch project leader. We were delighted to chat with FeederWatcher Lin Folsom who told us she was feeding gobs of Pine Siskins at her home near the coast between Seattle and Vancouver. In recent years, Lin has seen more and more Anna's Hummingbirds successfully overwintering well to the north of their traditional wintering areas.

Special thanks to our friends at Subaru who invited the Cornell Lab to talk about birds within their beautiful, bird-themed display and funded the giveaways as well as the travel expenses for Cornell Lab staff to attend to both shows.



MARY CUTLER

FeederWatch participant Lin Folsom, from Anacortes, Washington, with David Bonter at the Northwest Flower & Garden Show in February.



and 2013 (right).

Princé, Karine, and Benjamin Zuckerberg (2014). Climate change in our backyards: the reshuffling of North America's winter bird communities. *Global Change Biology* 20 (11).

More great photos headlined this year's BirdSpotter Photo Contest!

Congratulations to our BirdSpotter Photo Contest winners. Diane Marshman of New Milford, Pennsylvania, won the Grand Prize for her photo of a Baltimore Oriole enjoying an orange. She received new binoculars, scope, and tripod from Vanguard Photo, sponsor of this year's contest, as well as a framed Charlie Harper print and other prizes from the Cornell Lab. Second place went to Eileen Chorba of Beach Lake, Pennsylvania, and third place went to Mike Bons of Stirling, Ontario. All the contest winning photos can be



BirdSpotter Photo Contest Grand Prize winning photo of a Baltimore Oriole by Diane Marshman.

viewed on the BirdSpotter website at feederwatch.org/birdspotter2014. Thanks to everyone who entered photos and voted, making this year's contest so much fun!



Three easy steps for renewing your FeederWatch participation

Step 1. Select a renewal option

- ◆ **Receive a kit for online data entry.** This kit contains a welcome 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. 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).
- ◆ **Receive a kit with paper data forms.** This kit contains a welcome letter, *Winter Bird Highlights*, paper data forms, and a Bird-Watching Days calendar. Please only select this option if you are unable to submit data online. To order this kit, you must renew by mail or phone. The kit is sent in the fall. With this option, your data will not be incorporated into the database until the following season.

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. If you would like to receive paper forms, you must renew by mail or phone.
- ◆ **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.

