

2017–18 Project FeederWatch

End-of-Season News Note

Thank you for another successful FeederWatch season! See inside this letter to read about what FeederWatch behavior interactions data are telling researchers about why Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers look alike. We also introduce a new project assistant and feature a donor who brought FeederWatch to 50 classrooms as well as a few of the classes that benefited. As we begin to analyze the data from this past season, you can see initial results in the Explore Data section of our website. Look for more details in *Winter Bird Highlights*, published in the fall.

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 paper 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.

Save paper—skip the kit

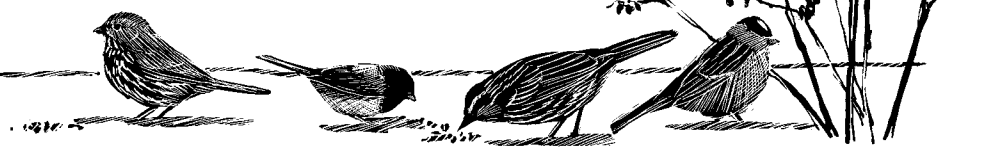
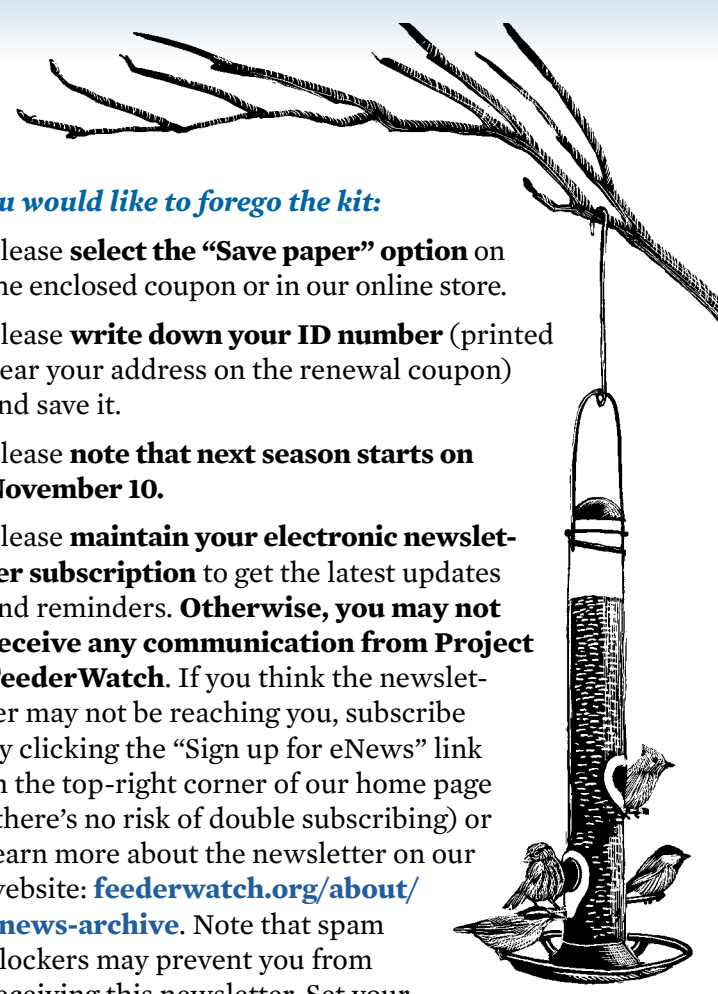
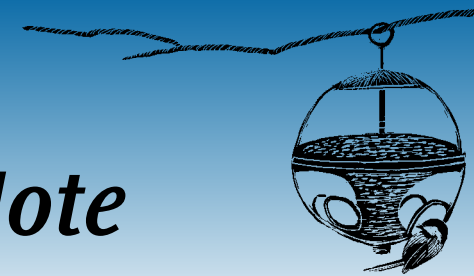
All renewing participants receive a kit with a calendar and *Winter Bird Highlights* unless you choose the option to save paper.

If you would like to forego the kit:

- ◆ Please **select the “Save paper” option** on the enclosed coupon or in our online store.
- ◆ 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 10.**
- ◆ Please **maintain your electronic newsletter subscription** to get the latest updates and reminders. **Otherwise, you may not receive any 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 13 marked the last day to count birds for the 2017–18 FeederWatch season. If you have already submitted your counts, thank you! If you still have counts to report, please submit your data today. Counts reported by the end of May will be included in this fall’s *Winter Bird Highlights*.



FeederWatch welcomes a new project assistant

Former Project FeederWatch assistant Chelsea Benson moved to a new position at Cornell University at the end of 2017. We were sorry to see Chelsea go, but we are delighted to welcome Holly Faulkner to the team. She was working in the Public Engagement in Science program at the Cornell Lab before coming to FeederWatch. Holly graduated from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in 2014. Before coming to Cornell, she worked in Minnesota

as an Avian Research Technician collecting data on Golden-winged Warblers and American Woodcock, and she worked in Wilson, New York, as a field technician for the DEC collecting data on the endangered Karner blue butterfly. Holly has already taken over social networking initiatives and has been corresponding with participants by phone and email. Like Chelsea, Holly will be splitting her time between Project FeederWatch and NestWatch. Welcome aboard, Holly!



Why do Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers look so similar when they are more closely related to other woodpeckers?

Since Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers look so similar, one might assume that they are closely related, but that's not true. Hairy Woodpeckers are more closely related to White-headed and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers while Downy's closest relatives are Ladder-backed and Nuttall's Woodpeckers. So why do Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers look so much alike?

Scientists have speculated that Downy Woodpeckers might benefit from looking like Hairy Woodpeckers because a Hairy Woodpecker might be less likely to chase a Downy away from food or other valuable resources if it thinks the Downy is a Hairy. But this theory had never been tested until now. Using behavioral interaction data collected by FeederWatch participants, a research team at the Cornell Lab discovered that Hairy Woodpeckers chased Downy Woodpeckers away from feeders at least as much as you would expect based on random encounters.¹



GARY MUELLER

Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers

Then the researchers tested a different idea: maybe the similarity fools species other than Hairy Woodpeckers. The researchers found that Downy Woodpeckers are especially dominant for their size—that is, they can win at scuffles involving some species much larger than themselves (such as Northern Cardinals, which weigh almost twice as much as a Downy). Perhaps Downy Woodpeckers use their resemblance to Hairy Woodpeckers to fool other species into thinking they are the bigger Hairy Woodpecker. More observations are needed to confirm this theory.

¹Leighton, GM, AC Lees, ET Miller. 2018. The hairy-downy game revisited: an empirical test of the interspecific social dominance mimicry hypothesis. *Animal Behavior* 137:141-148.

Find tips for distinguishing these two very similar woodpeckers and other tricky identifications at feederwatch.org/learn/tricky-bird-ids

Donation brings FeederWatch to 50 schools

Thanks to a generous gift from the Waud family, 50 schools were able to participate in Project FeederWatch this season at no charge. Doris Waud, a longtime public school teacher, was actively involved in the creation of Classroom FeederWatch at the Cornell Lab. That project has since evolved into BirdSleuth. Doris lost her battle with cancer last year, and her family wanted to honor her with a gift that would allow schools to participate in the project Doris loved.



Doris Waud

BirdSpotter featured teachers using FeederWatch

We created a FeederWatch in the Classroom award as part of our BirdSpotter contest this year to honor a few of the teachers who received a Waud-funded FeederWatch membership for their schools. Congratulations to the three winners!

Phoebe Griffith, Mead School, Stamford, Connecticut

Phoebe's third- and fourth-grade students recorded birds they spotted throughout the day while they learned about the birds in class. Phoebe told us that many students became so invested in counting for FeederWatch that when the official bird unit ended, "many of the students kept watching birds!" A lifelong birder, Phoebe went on to say, "It helps to be passionate about a topic you are teaching. The kids see how much you love it, and they gain a different perspective."

Seth Almekinder, Naples Elementary School, Naples, New York

Seth's fifth-grade classes are filled with outdoor activities, so adding FeederWatch was a natural fit. Seth wrote, "I like the citizen science aspect and having kids learn more about their local environment." Seth teaches bird identification and asks students to select a bird species to research. A window feeder allows students to get close to the birds while another set of feeders occupies the courtyard. Students observe the feeders from in the classroom and out in the courtyard and get excited about doing "real science."

Read more about these teachers and classrooms on the FeederWatch blog at feederwatch.org/blog.

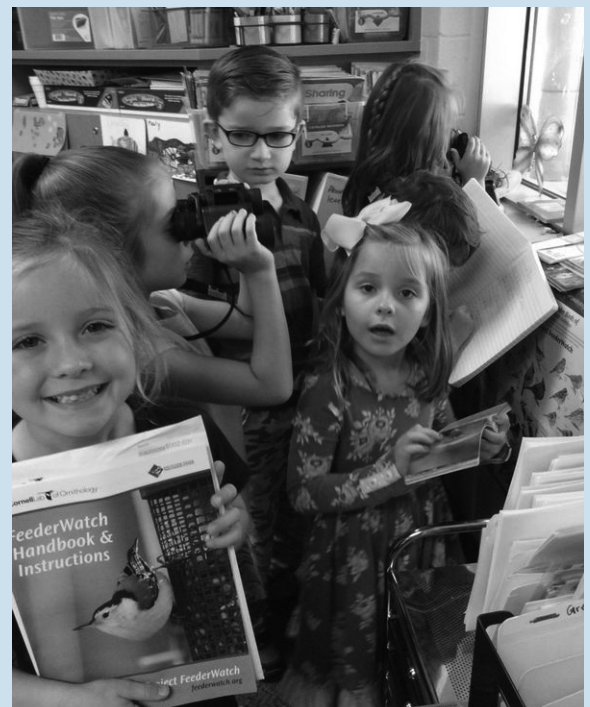
Jennifer Ford, Farnsworth Middle School, Guilderland, New York

Jennifer began FeederWatching at home and quickly realized that adding FeederWatch to her eighth-grade science class would be a great opportunity for her students to participate in a project that extends beyond their local community. Students use FeederWatch data to answer questions such as: What types of bird seed

and bird feeders do birds prefer? Does the placement of a bird feeder affect how many birds visit it? "I also integrate the feeders into many of my lessons as 'teachable moments,'" Jennifer wrote. "When we talk about invasive species, we research House Sparrows. A hawk visiting the feeders leads to a discussion on food webs." Jennifer teamed up with the school's math teacher to do a statistics project with FeederWatch data. Near the bird-watching area, Jennifer has a host of resources available including age-appropriate field guides and binoculars. Jennifer wrote, "I have students who spend lunch periods with me because they would rather watch birds than sit in the cafeteria."

Grateful to all participating teachers

We wish we could feature all the teachers who use Project FeederWatch to inspire future generations to appreciate birds and the natural world. We couldn't resist sharing this photo from Darcy Petzold of her first-grade students at Eagle Springs Elementary School in Humble, Texas.



Three easy steps for renewing your FeederWatch participation

Step 1. Select a renewal option

- ◆ **Send me the calendar and *Winter Bird Highlights*.** With this option we will send you a letter, *Winter Bird Highlights*, and a Bird-Watching Days calendar in the fall.
- ◆ **Save paper—I do not need a calendar or a print copy of *Winter Bird Highlights*.** 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 or contact us by phone or email 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.

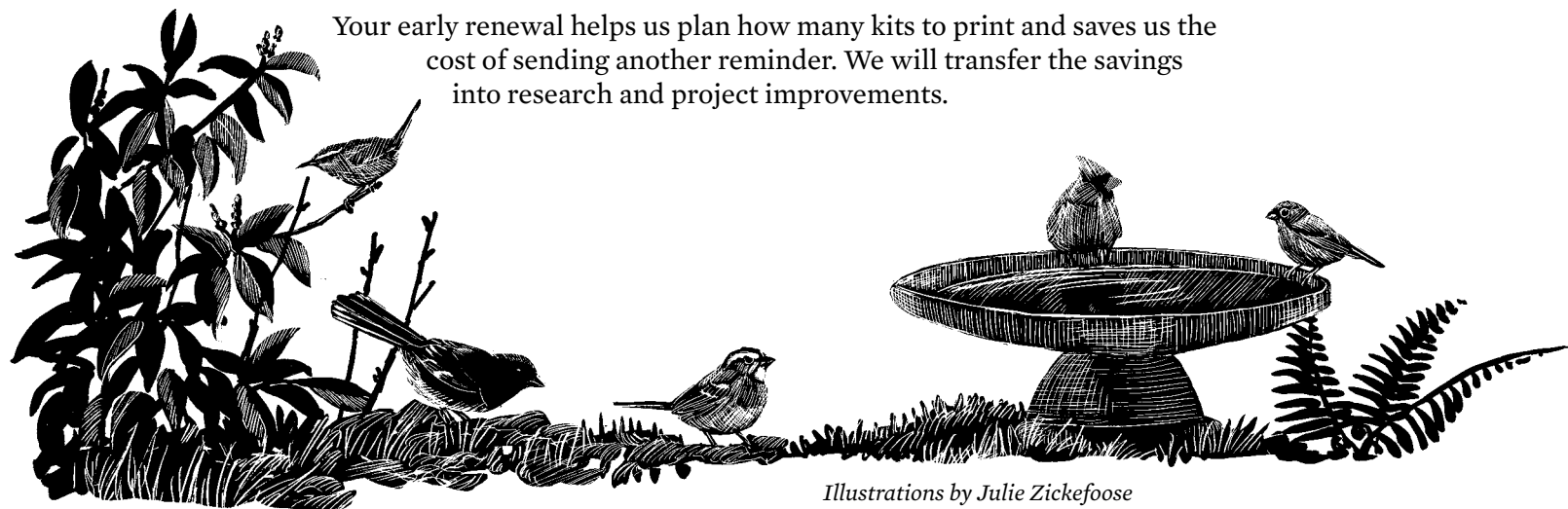
Step 2. Send \$18 (\$15 for Lab members) annual fee

- ◆ **Over the Internet.** Sign up using a credit card (VISA, Mastercard, DISCOVER, or American Express) over our secure server at 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.



Illustrations by Julie Zickefoose