FOCUS ON CITIZEN SCIENCE • VOLUME 10

Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2014–15

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Bird Studies Canada / Études d'oiseaux Canada

AllAboutBirds.org/feederwatchcam

You may have noticed the snowman feeder on Tammie Haché's FeederWatch Cam, located in Manitouwadge, Ontario. Check out the live streaming cam this winter on the Bird Cams Ontario FeederWatch page of the Cornell Lab's All About Birds website.

Cover Photo by Donald Navarre.

Focus on Citizen Science is a publication highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This issue, *Winter Bird Highlights 2014*, 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.

United States

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FeederWatch Welcomes New U.S. Project Leader

Jim Duehr

We are very excited to welcome our new project leader, Emma Greig. Prior to joining the FeederWatch team, Emma was a postdoctoral associate in the Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology where she studied behavioral ecology and evolution in Australian fairy-wrens. Emma holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and has studied birds in Australia, Malaysia, and Hawaii.

In June Emma spent two weeks working with students from the University of Chicago on a desert ecology field course and piloting work with a favorite southwestern bird, the Verdin. Emma and students color-banded 20 Verdin in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and recorded their simple 3-note songs to look at how individuals differ in their vocalizations. Next summer Emma will return to Arizona with another group of students to check on the newly color-banded birds.

Verdin by Sam Wilson

The Hummingbird and Our Neighbor

BY ED DOMBROFSKI, FEEDERWATCH PARTICIPANT

Reviewing photos I took of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds visiting our feeder in Morehead City, North Carolina, I noticed that one of the male birds had a silver band on its right leg. I sent the images to Susan Campbell, the North Carolina expert on hummingbirds, a registered hummingbird bander, and an affiliate with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science. She immediately scheduled a time to come and catch the bird to read the band and gather other information.

Ed Dombrofski

This Ruby-throated Hummingbird visited Ed Dombrofski's feeder in North Carolina last season. It had been banded in 2012.

Before Susan arrived, the weather turned very cold, and the nectar in our feeder started turning to slush. Susan instructed us to construct a lightbulb heater for the feeder. I used an incandescent clamp light at first, but I had more success when I switched to an insulated tin can shielding a drop-cord light with a 60-watt bulb.

Both the banded male and two females survived the cold and were visiting our feeder the day Susan arrived. She set up a wire cage trap with a large hinged hatch held open by a rod attached to a pull cord. Susan placed our nectar feeder inside the trap. Then with the pull cord in hand, she concealed herself by the side of the house.

We and a few interested neighbors observed the activity from our living room window. We anticipated a long wait, but on the bird's first pass, it entered and started feeding. Susan sprang the hatch closed. Then she quickly removed the bird, placed it in a small drawstring bag, and carried it indoors to examine it.

After reading the characters on the band, she checked her records and found that she had banded this bird in Mattamuskeet, North Carolina, at the Davis family farm on December 14, 2012. At that point Jane Edwards, our neighbor, exclaimed, "That is where I am from. The Davis's are my cousins."

After a lively discussion, it was time to release the bird. It seemed appropriate, since Jane and the bird had explored the same haunts, that she would be the one to release it.

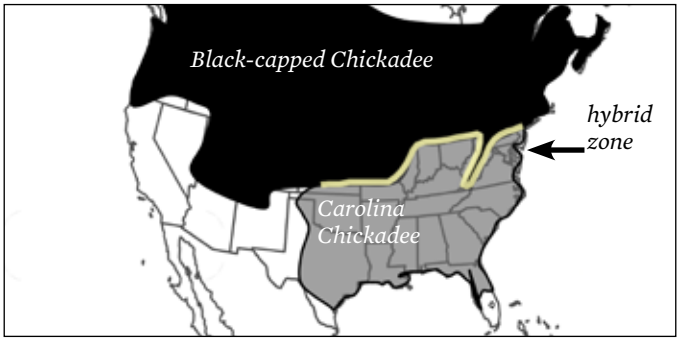
New Research About Chickadee Range Shifts

BY EMMA GREIG, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

As winter approaches, chickadees form winter flocks and are sure to become a common sight at feeders. In the East, Black-capped Chickadees live in the north and Carolina Chickadees live in the south. Where their ranges overlap—a narrow band that runs from New Jersey to Kansas—they will interbreed and produce hybrid offspring.

Scott Taylor, a postdoctoral fellow at the Cornell Lab, is using sophisticated genetic methods to gain a better understanding of hybridization between these species.[1] He is using eBird records to determine if the hybrid zone has moved north over the past decade, and he is using climate modeling to determine if climate change plays a role in the movement of the hybrid zone.

"A lot of evidence suggests that bird species are responding quickly to climate change and are expanding their ranges north," Scott said. "Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Carolina Wrens are two examples. It seems like Carolina Chickadees are also expanding north, and this is causing the hybrid zone to shift."



The hybrid zone for Black-capped and Carolina chickadees appears to have moved about seven miles north in the past decade.

Previous work, however, found different explanations for the northward expansion of Carolina Chickadees. Researchers found that Carolina Chickadee males tend to be more dominant than Black-capped males in aviary experiments.[2] Female chickadees pay attention to these interactions and choose the most dominant males as mates, even if they are the wrong species! Such female preferences could allow male Carolina Chickadees to spread their genes northward and cause the hybrid zone to move.

Whether it is because of dominant males or a changing climate, Scott's work will help us better understand the degree and mechanism of hybrid zone movement. "Our preliminary results show that the hybrid zone has moved significantly over the past decade and climate change may be an important factor." Scott explained.

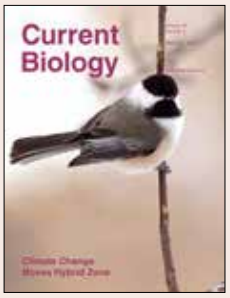
[1] Taylor, S. A., White, T. A., Hochachka, W. M., Ferretti, V., Curry, R. L. and Lovette, I. 2014. Climate-mediated movement of an avian hybrid zone. *Current Biology*, 24, 671–676.

[2] Bronson, C. L., Grubb, T. C., Sattler, G. D. and Braun, M. J. 2003. Mate preference: a possible causal mechanism for a moving hybrid zone. *Animal Behaviour*, 65, 489–500.

Reporting chickadees

Project participants near the overlap zone should always enter counts for any chickadees they see as Black-capped Chickadee/Carolina Chickadee if entering counts online and as Blkcap/Carolina Chick on the paper forms. Visit our Tricky IDs page in the Learn section of our website for tips to distinguish the two species.

Participant photo featured on journal cover

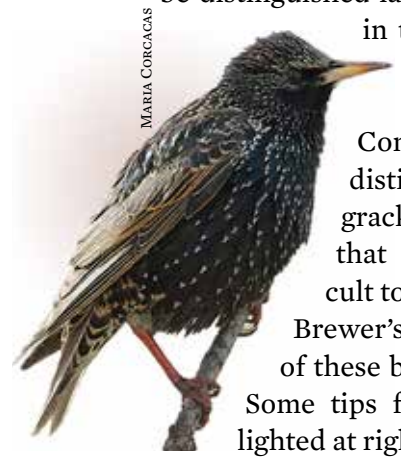


Scott's work was published recently in the journal *Current Biology*, one of the most respected scientific journals. And especially exciting for us is that the cover of the journal issue with Scott's article featured a photo from FeederWatch participant Jeff Hurd!

Which Black Bird Is It?

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

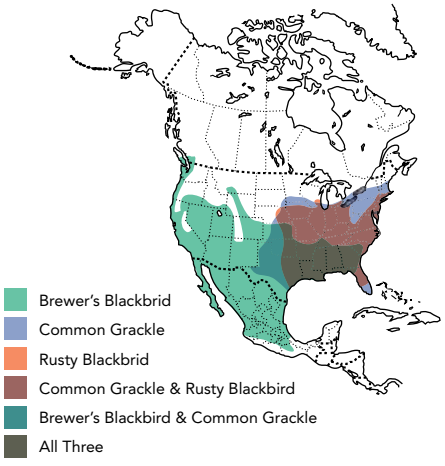
Some male blackbirds, like Red-winged and Yellow-headed, have color markings that help us identify them. But others are almost plain black. The very similar-looking Boat-tailed, Great-tailed, and Common grackles can be distinguished largely by range: Great-tailed in the Southwest, Common in the East, and Boat-tailed on the East and Gulf coasts. Common Grackle can also be distinguished from the other grackles by its shorter tail, but that shorter tail makes it difficult to distinguish from Rusty and Brewer's blackbirds, and all three of these black birds overlap in range. Some tips for identification are highlighted at right.



Maria Corcacas

European Starling

In addition, there are two mostly black birds that show up at feeders in winter: European Starlings and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Since they often travel in flocks with other black birds, they can complicate identification. Fortunately, there are subtle field marks to help set these two birds apart. European Starlings have white speckles in fall and winter that gradually wear off, leaving an iridescent, black bird by spring, but at the same time the bill color changes to yellow. Male Brown-headed Cowbirds have sparrow-like bills and brown heads.



Common Grackle, Brewer's Blackbird, and Rusty Blackbird ranges overlap in winter.

Distinguishing three confusing black birds with overlapping ranges

Common Grackle
(Quiscalus quiscula)

Susan Szeszol

- 11–13 in (28–34 cm)
- Long, heavy bill
- Pale or yellow eye
- Head often appears as though it lacks a forehead
- Long, broad tail, but shorter than Boat-tailed or Great-tailed
- Far more common at feeders throughout range than Boat-tailed or Great-tailed
- Both males and females are black, whereas female Boat-tailed and Great-tailed are more brown.

Brewer's Blackbird
(Euphagus cyanocephalus)

Brandon Green

- 8–10 in (20–25 cm)
- Short, straight bill
- Male has yellow eye, female usually has dark eye
- Short, narrow tail
- Male is dull black overall with lighter coloring over eyes and on throat in early winter; by late winter male is glossy black.
- Female is drab gray-brown, darkest on wings and tail.
- Prefer open areas, like lawns, coastal scrub, and parks

Rusty Blackbird
(Euphagus carolinus)

Gary Mueller

- 8–10 in (21–15 cm)
- Thin, slightly curved bill
- Pale or yellow eye
- Short, narrow tail
- Dark feathers of male edged with rusty brown in early winter that wears away, leaving glossy black feathers by spring.
- Lighter brown eyebrow and throat in winter that contrasts with dark around eye.
- Female is pale brown
- Prefer wet areas, like swamps, marshes, and pond edges

Effects of Severe Winter in Canada

Hairy Woodpecker by Ric Hornsby

BY KERRIE WILCOX, BIRD STUDIES CANADA

In Canada, the Project FeederWatch season was one of the coldest and snowiest in recent memory. In Winnipeg, temperatures fell to -37°C (-35°F) on January 5. Snowfall records were set in Windsor, Calgary, and many other cities across Canada. Toronto and Saskatoon experienced their coldest winter in two decades.

Even Vancouver's typically mild temperatures disappeared in February, which was one of their coldest and snowiest months in years. Many of the 3,124 registered participants in Canada commented on the frigid temperatures, harsh winds, and snow and ice this past season. They also noted low numbers of birds outside their windows.

Population Trends in 2013–14

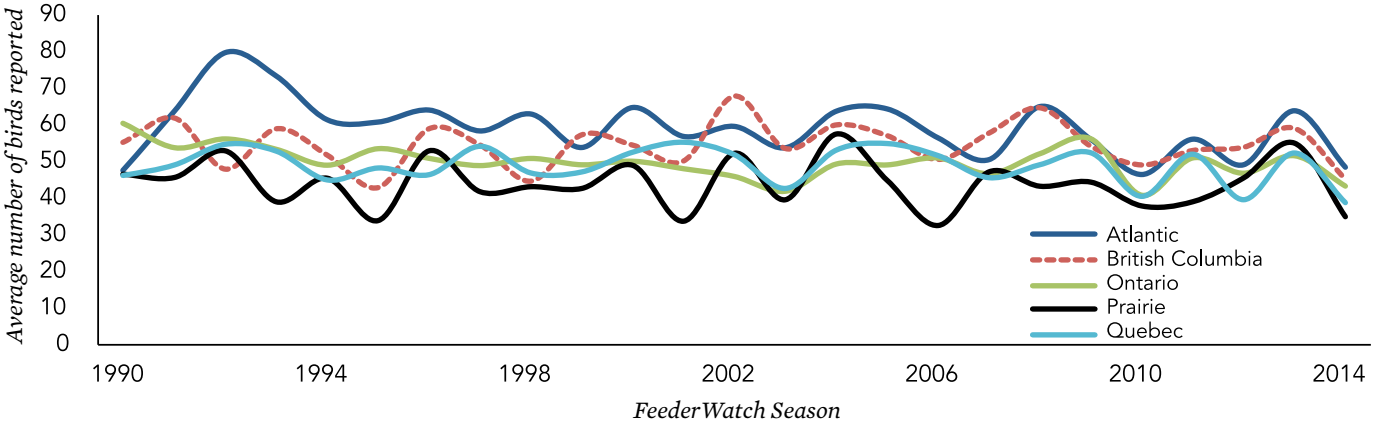
"This has been an exceptionally cold and harsh winter for our birds. This is the first time I have seen so few winter birds," wrote Hubert Perey of Brandon, Manitoba. His sentiments were echoed by participants across Canada, and FeederWatch results support their observations. Average numbers of individual birds per week at each FeederWatch location were down in every province and were at a record low of 42 across the country as a whole; the long-term average is 51 individual birds per week at each station.

Data from the 2013–14 season also show lower average numbers of species at each station, down to 13.7 per season from 16.3 the previous season. The long-term average is 14.8, so once again your perceptions were correct—there was less variety at your feeders!

Carolina Wren

Because Carolina Wrens are southern birds that have been expanding their range northward over the past few decades, you might expect to see them in lower numbers during a harsh winter. Carolina Wrens don't migrate, and pairs keep a territory year-round. Since they eat mostly insects, tough winters can make their usual food scarce, and Carolina Wrens can suffer high mortality when snow covers the leaf litter where they forage. Providing food and roosting cavities may help reduce mortality at the northern edge of the range.

Average number of birds reported per week at each site



The average number of individuals reported per week at FeederWatch sites in all Canada regions combined hit a record low of 42 in the 2013–14 season. Atlantic = Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Prairie = Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

FeederWatch results from the 2013–14 season show small declines in numbers of individual birds at feeders in both Québec and Ontario.

To help wintering Carolina Wrens at your feeding station, provide suet, sunflower-seed hearts, small peanut pieces, and mealworms. Like other wrens, Carolinas like to have a secure place to hide, so a brush pile may help attract them to your yard. The brush pile may also shelter small insects that would supplement the wrens' diets.

American Robins

Another species that may have a hard time during harsh winters is the American Robin. In winter, robins get up to 80% of their diet from fruit—whereas only 10% of their diet is fruit-based in spring. Although robins generally stay in dense vegetation looking for food, bad weather can force them to change habitats or move into suburban areas. As long as food is available, robins can withstand severe cold. Late spring snowfalls have been known to cause large die-offs by preventing ground foraging at a time when most fruit sources have been exhausted. Under these conditions, large numbers of robins may descend on feeders, eating just about anything offered. During the harsh 2013–14 winter, more Canadian FeederWatch sites were visited by robins—44% compared with the long-term average of 37%. FeederWatchers in the Atlantic provinces in particular saw robins at a high number of sites—55% of sites, compared with the long-term average of 41%.

Mourning Doves

Deep snow drives Mourning Dove flocks to areas where feeders are common. Regardless of snow conditions, cold weather alone may cause problems for Mourning Doves. One study showed that a majority of the birds spending the winter in Ontario were found to have lost one or more toes to frostbite.[1] While most of the Mourning Doves that breed in Canada migrate south in winter, studies show that more and more are staying north. Some theorize the change is due to greater supplies of waste grain in fields, while others believe that bird feeding is a factor. FeederWatch data from the harsh 2013–14 winter show slight declines in the percentage of sites visited and in the average group size across the country.

To attract robins regularly, you should serve dried or fresh fruit and offer a source of water.

American Robin in Ontario by Helena Garcia

You can help Anna's Hummingbirds during cold snaps by providing extra nectar feeders or by serving sugar water in a dish for a few days.

Anna's Hummingbird in British Columbia by Bruce Whittington

Anna's Hummingbirds

Cold snaps can decimate Anna's Hummingbird populations by wilting flowers and killing insects, the bird's main food supply. Surprisingly, FeederWatch data did not show a decline in Anna's Hummingbirds this past winter. Their numbers are continuing to increase, and they visited a record 45% of sites in British Columbia.

Thanks to participants for persevering!

Special thanks to FeederWatchers for continuing to diligently stock and monitor your feeders. We hope you enjoyed the season despite the tribulations and trials of the winter. As Lois Brockman of Winnipeg, Manitoba, wrote, "FeederWatch is a wonderful winter activity. One marvels at the stamina of the birds while enjoying the cozy warmth of the indoors." We couldn't agree more!

1 Armstrong, E.R., and D.L. Noakes. 1983. Wintering Biology of Mourning Doves, *Zenaida macroura*, in Ontario. *Canadian Field Naturalist* 97:434–438.

Regional roundup

Trends and highlights from the 2013–14 FeederWatch season

BY EMMA GREIG, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

The past FeederWatch season brought some exciting new observations from participants and a fantastic 128,586 checklists submitted online from 9,940 unique locations. Thank you, everyone!

Some highlights this year come from the Alaska and Northern Canada region, where Common Ravens were more abundant than ever, reported at a record 61% of sites. In the Southeast, Yellow-rumped Warblers continued to increase, reported at a record 53% of sites. Participants in the northern regions observed a tremendous decline in two irruptive species at their feeders, Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls. These species apparently found adequate food in the boreal forest last winter. In both the Northwest and Southwest regions, Bushtits were on the rise, and Anna's Hummingbirds continue to spread northward along the Pacific.

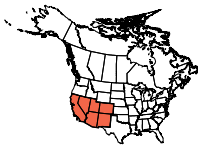
This year in our Top-25 charts we list the species rankings for 2013–14, based on the percent of sites visited in 2013–14, as well as the average ranking calculated since 2000. We also list the percent of sites visited and the average flock size when the species was seen at a site. Enjoy!

HAWAII TOP-15 LIST: 2 SITES

Hawaii had a small but significant representation with two participants. The Top-15 species reported include some special birds not observed anywhere else in North America!

Java Sparrow
Japanese White-eye
Spotted Dove
House Sparrow
Zebra Dove
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-billed Leiothrix
Saffron Finch
Common Waxbill
Common Myna
Red-crested Cardinal
Red-whiskered Bulbul
House Finch
White-rumped Shama
Northern Cardinal

Northern Cardinal by Laura Frazier



Southwest & California Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 870 SITES REPORTING

Rank 2013–14	*Average rank*	*Species*	*Percent of sites 2013–14*	*Average flock size 2013–14*
1	1	House Finch	90	6
2	2	Dark-eyed Junco	79	5
3	3	Mourning Dove	68	4
4	4	Western Scrub-Jay	58	2
5	7	American Robin	58	2
6	6	House Sparrow	55	6
7	9	Lesser Goldfinch	55	5
8	5	White-crowned Sparrow	54	5
9	9	Northern Flicker	53	2
10	11	Anna's Hummingbird	50	2
11	26	Eurasian Collared-Dove	45	3
12	9	American Goldfinch	45	5
13	17	American Crow	40	3
14	13	Spotted Towhee	39	2
15	19	Downy Woodpecker	36	1
16	15	California Towhee	35	2
17	18	White-breasted Nuthatch	35	1
18	24	Cooper's Hawk	34	1
19	24	Bushtit	33	6
20	19	"Plain" Titmouse*	32	1
21	16	European Starling	31	4
22	21	Steller's Jay	29	3
23	25	Yellow-rumped Warbler	29	2
24	25	Black-capped Chickadee	28	2
25	24	Golden-crowned Sparrow	26	4

* "Plain" Titmouse combines Oak Titmouse and Juniper Titmouse

One of the most endearing of our feeder visitors, the Bushtit, was reported at a record number of sites in the Southwest and California. Reported at 33% of sites with an average flock size of 6 individuals, Bushtits were gobbling up suet like fiends! These very social southwestern birds are also on the rise in the Northwest.

Another delightful but very occasional feeder visitor is the Verdin, with its chestnut shoulders and yellow face. Although seen infrequently (only at 5% of sites with a rank of 76), they have had a consistent presence in counts since 1989. We don't see them often at feeders because they find their favorite foods elsewhere, such as saguaro fruits or mesquite pods.

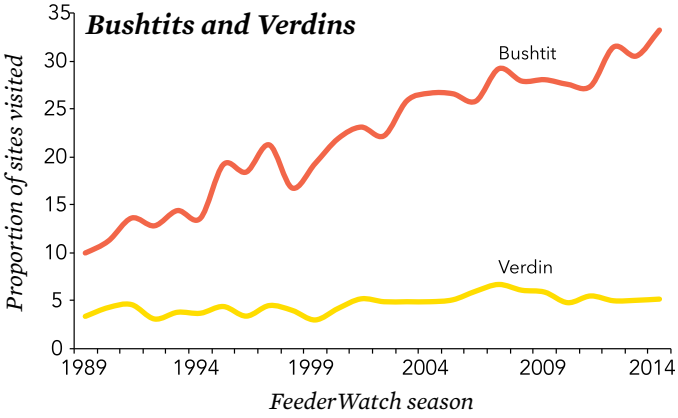
In Arizona we had one report of a Golden-crowned Sparrow. This species is common in California but only occasionally seen farther east. This winter, one made a rare appearance in Cibola, Arizona.

David Smith

Male and female Bushtits are distinguished by eye color. The Bushtit shown here is a male. Females have pale eyes.

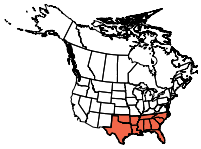
Judy Crawford

Golden-crowned Sparrow in the yard of Judy Crawford at the Oxbow Campground in Cibola, Arizona. Fortunately, Judy was watching her feeders when the bird stopped by and was able to get a photo.



Bushtit reports have steadily increased in the Southwest and California. Verdins have kept a constant presence since 1989.

Southeast & South-Central Regions



In the Southeast it was another great year for the petite and distinctly plumaged Yellow-rumped Warbler, named for the bright yellow patch on its rump that helps distinguish it from other migrating warblers. This species was reported at a record 53% of sites and has been consistently increasing in numbers for the past two decades. Another striking warbler, the Yellow-throated Warbler, made some welcome appearances in the Southeast at feeders in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Texas, and Tennessee, all rare sightings for winter. One exceptionally unusual southeastern sighting in winter was a Cape May Warbler, which stopped at a feeder in Charlotte, North Carolina, to pick up a few insects among the fallen seeds beneath a feeder.

The most commonly reported species in the Southeast remained the Northern Cardinal. With their specialized seed-eating bills, they are especially fit to enjoy the black-oil sunflower seeds commonly found in backyard feeders; it is no wonder they are such a regular feeder visitor.

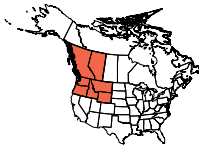
Common Grackles almost fell off the Top 25 list in the 2012–13 FeederWatch season when they were reported at 36% of sites. They increased ever so slightly last winter (40% of sites), but remain at #25 on the list.

TOP-25 LIST: 1,324 SITES REPORTING

Rank 2013–14	*Average rank*	*Species*	*Percent of sites 2013–14*	*Average flock size 2013–14*
1	1	Northern Cardinal	97	4
2	4	Carolina Chickadee	88	2
3	2	Mourning Dove	88	4
4	4	American Goldfinch	83	6
5	5	Tufted Titmouse	82	2
6	6	Carolina Wren	81	1
7	6	Blue Jay	80	2
8	8	Red-bellied Woodpecker	76	1
9	9	House Finch	75	3
10	11	Northern Mockingbird	71	1
11	11	Downy Woodpecker	68	1
12	12	American Robin	64	3
13	12	Dark-eyed Junco	62	4
14	17	Chipping Sparrow	56	6
15	18	Yellow-rumped Warbler	53	2
16	20	Eastern Bluebird	51	2
17	14	White-throated Sparrow	51	3
18	20	Red-winged Blackbird	47	7
19	19	American Crow	46	3
20	20	Brown-headed Cowbird	43	5
21	21	White-breasted Nuthatch	43	1
22	27	Pine Warbler	41	2
23	24	Eastern Towhee	41	2
24	24	House Sparrow	40	6
25	19	Common Grackle	40	5

Bob Vuxinic

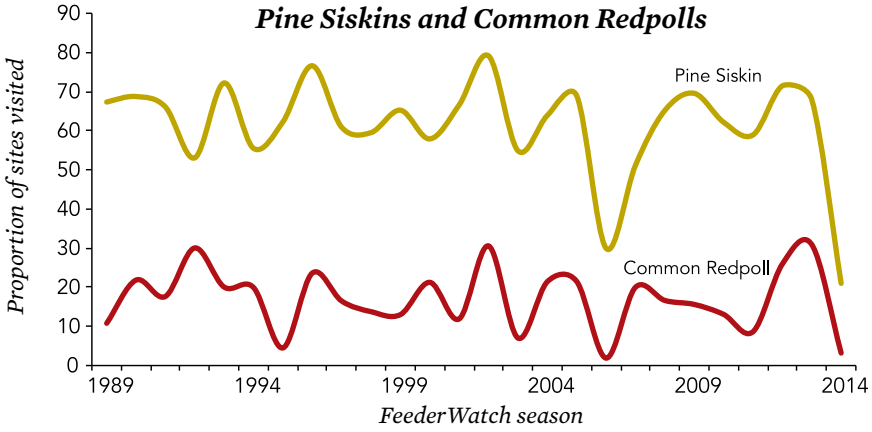
Yellow-rumped Warbler reports are gradually increasing in the Southeast.



Pacific Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 1,033 SITES REPORTING

Rank 2013–14	*Average rank*	*Species*	*Percent of sites 2013–14*	*Average flock size 2013–14*
1	1	Dark-eyed Junco	92	8
2	2	Black-capped Chickadee	82	3
3	3	Northern Flicker	79	2
4	4	House Finch	70	5
5	6	American Robin	65	2
6	7	Downy Woodpecker	61	1
7	9	Song Sparrow	61	2
8	10	Spotted Towhee	59	2
9	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	57	1
10	10	European Starling	53	4
11	12	Steller's Jay	51	3
12	15	Varied Thrush	50	2
13	27	Anna's Hummingbird	49	2
14	12	House Sparrow	47	6
15	14	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	46	3
16	16	American Goldfinch	38	5
17	16	American Crow	38	3
18	21	Bushtit	35	11
19	21	Fox Sparrow	35	2
20	18	Hairy Woodpecker	32	1
21	23	Mourning Dove	29	4
22	25	Golden-crowned Sparrow	28	3
23	49	Eurasian Collared-Dove	26	4
24	29	White-crowned Sparrow	26	2
25	22	Red-winged Blackbird	25	5



Participants in the Northwest saw a sharp decline in Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls but can expect to see more of these irruptive species this coming winter.

The irruptive Pine Siskin, with its elaborate buzzing songs and delicate streaked plumage, had an off year at feeders in the Northwest, with a record low of only 21% of sites reporting this species. Pine Siskins are nomadic and move in response to seed crops, which is why they appear at feeders in large numbers some years but are nearly absent in other years. With a rank of 31, they didn't make the Top 25 this year. Common Redpolls, another irruptive species, had a similarly low turnout at feeders across the continent, so food sources must have been abundant in northern Canada. Common Redpolls ranked only 69, in contrast to their ranking of 22 in the 2012–13 season!

Dark-eyed Juncos take first place as the most frequently reported species in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain region, reported at 92% of sites with an average flock size of 8. This species has been doing consistently well across all regions ever since FeederWatch began, so it is no surprise that it remains at #1.

Anna's Hummingbirds continue to increase their winter abundance and move northward, with a record high ranking of 13 and reports from 49% of sites. In many cases just a single bird was reported, but we received reports of as many as eight Anna's Hummingbirds at one time from Oregon. Of course, this doesn't compare to the number of individuals that may be present in more southern locations—a report of 80 in California takes the prize this year!

Not all hummingbird reports are of Anna's Hummingbirds, however. Gail Cerveny was excited to host a rare Costa's Hummingbird at her feeder in Gresham, Oregon. A brightly plumaged male, with his striking purple face and pointed bib, visited the feeder repeatedly over the winter, giving Gail ample opportunity to get a diagnostic photograph of the bird.

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

Carolina Wrens continued their upward trend in the Northeast, with a record 51% of sites visited. When they visit feeders, they are almost always seen in small numbers, usually one or two individuals at most. They are most commonly found on suet feeders. We are excited to keep watching this species to see if they will continue to increase their winter range, so keep your eyes open for these wrens next season.

Field Sparrows made rare appearances at feeders in Cambridge, Nova Scotia, and Sturgis, Michigan. These sparrows are usually in the Southeast during winter and make only the occasional appearance farther north. They are easily confused with American Tree Sparrows, which rank 22 in the Northeast, and perhaps they go unnoticed in mixed flocks.

Susan Krenicki

This Yellow-rumped Warbler visited the feeder of Susan Krenicki in Waterford, Connecticut, in February.

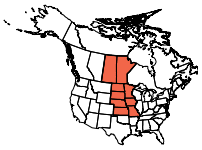
TOP-25 LIST: 5,989 SITES REPORTING

Rank 2013–14	*Average rank*	*Species*	*Percent of sites 2013–14*	*Average flock size 2013–14*
1	1	Chickadee*	96	3
2	3	Dark-eyed Junco	94	5
3	3	Mourning Dove	92	5
4	4	Downy Woodpecker	90	2
5	6	American Goldfinch	89	5
6	6	Northern Cardinal	89	3
7	5	Blue Jay	89	3
8	8	White-breasted Nuthatch	79	1
9	9	House Finch	74	4
10	13	Red-bellied Woodpecker	67	1
11	11	Tufted Titmouse	66	2
12	11	European Starling	66	4
13	14	American Robin	64	3
14	13	House Sparrow	63	7
15	14	Hairy Woodpecker	61	1
16	15	American Crow	52	2
17	21	Carolina Wren	51	1
18	19	Song Sparrow	48	2
19	19	White-throated Sparrow	48	3
20	17	Common Grackle	46	5
21	20	Red-winged Blackbird	42	4
22	23	American Tree Sparrow	41	3
23	24	Purple Finch	33	3
24	27	Cooper's Hawk	32	1
25	24	Brown-headed Cowbird	31	4

* Chickadee combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee

Richard Stern

Ruby Lawrence wrote of this Field Sparrow at her home in Waterville, Nova Scotia, "This is the second winter I have been blessed with a Field Sparrow! Many birders came to visit but only a few, including Richard [Stern, the photographer], managed to get the timing right!"



North-Central & Mid-Central Regions

TOP-25 LIST: 681 SITES REPORTING

Rank 2013–14	*Average rank*	*Species*	*Percent of sites 2013–14*	*Average flock size 2013–14*
1	1	Chickadee*	92	3
2	2	Downy Woodpecker	91	2
3	4	Blue Jay	88	3
4	3	Dark-eyed Junco	87	5
5	6	American Goldfinch	80	6
6	6	White-breasted Nuthatch	78	2
7	8	House Sparrow	73	8
8	8	Northern Cardinal	73	3
9	8	House Finch	72	4
10	10	Hairy Woodpecker	67	1
11	12	Red-bellied Woodpecker	65	1
12	13	American Robin	59	3
13	13	Mourning Dove	57	4
14	13	European Starling	56	5
15	15	American Crow	43	2
16	18	Northern Flicker	39	1
17	18	Purple Finch	33	3
18	17	Common Grackle	33	4
19	24	White-throated Sparrow	29	3
20	21	Tufted Titmouse	28	2
21	23	American Tree Sparrow	28	3
22	21	Red-winged Blackbird	26	4
23	25	Pileated Woodpecker	25	1
24	21	Red-breasted Nuthatch	24	1
25	31	Cooper's Hawk	23	1

* Chickadee combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee

Ric Hornsby (2)

One of the highlights from the North-Central and Mid-Central regions this season was an unexpected Brown Thrasher. Ric Hornsby from Arnes, Manitoba, wrote of his special visitor, "This Brown Thrasher is a daily visitor to my feeders. It is getting to be more relaxed around me.... I had no idea that this bird was such a rare sight at this time of year."

The top five species were almost identical to the top five last season. The only change was that American Goldfinch (#5 this year, #6 last year) switched positions with White-breasted Nuthatch. The consistent ranking is good news because it means that their populations are doing well. Black-capped and Carolina chickadees, Downy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays and Dark-eyed Juncos also continue to be common sights at feeders.

Pileated Woodpeckers didn't maintain the upward trend seen during the 2012–13 season but instead were seen at 25% of sites (compared to 26% last year). Cooper's Hawks, however, did maintain a subtle upward trend, reported at 23% of sites, compared to 20% last year.

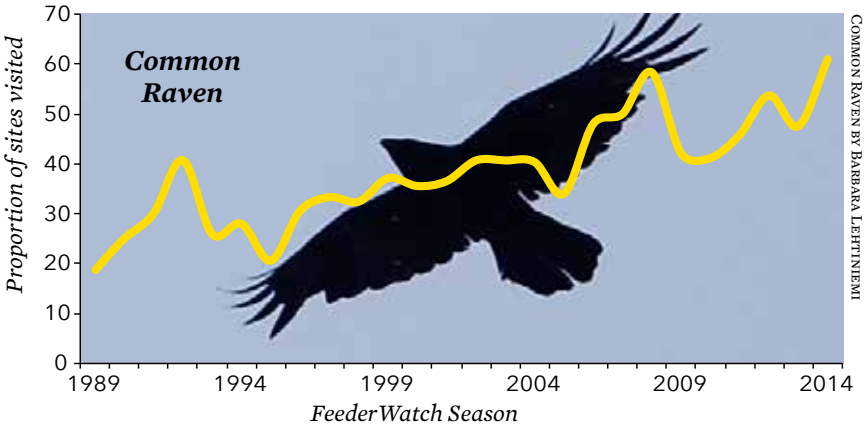
Brown Thrasher in Arnes, Manitoba (2).

Alaska & Northern Canada

Common Ravens visited a record number of sites in Alaska and northern Canada last winter, with the species reported at 61% of sites. This increase is consistent with reports from the North American Breeding Bird Survey, which found slow and steady increases in Common Raven populations for the past several decades. Black-capped Chickadees remain at the top of the rankings, being reported at 80% of sites. One very beautiful species, the Bohemian Waxwing, didn't make it into the top 10 this year but did increase in rank from 19 to 16, with reports at 17% of sites, and it was seen in very large numbers, with an average flock size of 27 birds. As in previous seasons, a Rustic Bunting (normally found in Asia) was one of the highlights of our Rare Bird Reports, this year found at a feeder in Homer, Alaska.

TOP-10 LIST: 41 SITES REPORTING

Rank 2013–14	*Average rank*	*Species*	*Percent of sites 2013–14*	*Average flock size 2013–14*
1	1	Black-capped Chickadee	80	5
2	9	Common Raven	61	3
3	5	Boreal Chickadee	61	2
4	5	Black-billed Magpie	59	2
5	2	Common Redpoll	51	7
6	9	Dark-eyed Junco	51	5
7	6	Downy Woodpecker	51	1
8	6	Hairy Woodpecker	51	1
9	5	Pine Grosbeak	46	7
10	11	Gray Jay	46	2



Common Raven by Barbara Lehtiniemi

Common Ravens visited feeders in Alaska and northern Canada in record-high numbers last season.

Tamara Reiser

Rustic Bunting in Homer, Alaska.

2013–14 FeederWatch Season Statistics

20,236 PARTICIPANTS 128,586 CHECKLISTS 6,562,163 BIRDS REPORTED

FeederWatch Data At Work

**BY EMMA GREIG,
CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY**

House Finch eye disease update

Understanding how pathogens, such as disease-causing bacteria, spread and change over time is critical to management of infectious diseases. House Finches are providing a unique window into disease dynamics. Scientists have tracked the spread of *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (a bacterial pathogen) in House Finches since it emerged in the Washington D.C. area in 1994. Now, nearly 20 years later, this bacteria has spread throughout eastern populations of House Finches, and it has been spreading in western populations since 2003.

Recent work by biologists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and at Virginia Tech shows that the bacteria's jump to western North America was accompanied by lower virulence (disease severity).[1] However, that virulence appears to have increased since 2003; now virulence in the West is as high as in the East. This change in virulence suggests that in order to spread across large geographic distances, virulence must be low, but in order for a disease to become more common, virulence must increase.

"We want to understand how this disease is spreading, if cases are more or less severe than they used to be, and how the birds' immune systems are adapting to fight this threat," says Wesley Hochachka, Assistant Director of Bird Population Studies at the Cornell Lab. The question now is: as the disease spreads and becomes more virulent, are House Finch defenses increasing as well?

Participants in Project FeederWatch across North America are helping by watching their feeders, looking for signs of the disease, and reporting what they find in their FeederWatch counts. The disease manifests as swelling around the eyes and is often accompanied by sticky feathers on the face and head.

It is especially important for project participants to indicate with their counts if they looked for the disease but did not see House Finches with apparent infection. You may think zeros are boring, but they are not! In order to track the spread of any disease, we need to know where it occurs, but also where it does not yet occur. Reports from locations in western states are especially important because these locations likely have newly arriving infected birds.

[1] Hawley, D. M., Osnas, E. E., Dobson, A. P., Hochachka, W. M., Ley, D. H. and Dhondt, A. A. 2013. Parallel patterns of increased virulence in a recently emerged wildlife pathogen. *Plos Biology*, 11.

Ernest Yanavich.

FeederWatchers help researchers understand how Monk Parakeets affect native bird populations.

Monk Parakeets

Flocks of squawking Monk Parakeets may seem out of place in cities such as Chicago and New York, but they have become common in recent years. These parrots are native to South America, but escaped pets became established in several North American cities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite the presence of Monk Parakeets for decades, we know very little about the impact they are having on native bird species.

"As Monk Parakeets and other naturalized species of parrots become more common, it is important to document their interactions with local species," says Stephen Pruett-Jones, a professor at the University of Chicago who is studying these birds. "There is considerable controversy as to whether Monk Parakeet populations should be controlled, and only with concrete data on whether the species is impacting native species can a responsible decision be made."

In the United States, Monk Parakeet numbers are slowly increasing. Recent research using data from Project FeederWatch showed that in northern locations Monk Parakeets are strongly tied to urban areas, likely dependent upon human resources for food and habitat. In more southern locations such as in Texas and Florida, their distribution is less restricted to urban areas.[1]

Project FeederWatch participants are helping us understand how Monk Parakeets are affecting native species. Reports from urban areas such as Chicago, Florida, Houston, Austin, and New York are extremely helpful, even if you don't have Monk Parakeets at your feeders. We need data on native species from sites both with and without Monk Parakeets in order to understand this species' impact.

1 Davis, A. Y., Malas, N. and Minor, E. S. 2014. Substitutable habitats? The biophysical and anthropogenic drivers of an exotic bird's distribution. *Biological Invasions*, 16, 415-427.

BirdSpotter Photo Contest: A Rainbow of Color!

BY SUSAN NEWMAN, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

This FeederWatch season we hosted our second annual BirdSpotter photo contest, sponsored by Bob's Red Mill. We moved the contest to our website, opening it to everyone and no longer requiring Facebook membership.

As can be seen from the photos featured here, the 2013–14 BirdSpotter photo contest inspired a rainbow of submissions. Melissa Penta's photo of a curious-looking House Finch (right) was this year's Grand Prize winner. Along with numerous prizes from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bob's Red Mill, Melissa won a trip to Bob's headquarters in Oregon and a birding trip around Portland. Look for a report of her trip on the FeederWatch blog and Facebook page this fall, along with instructions for next year's contest.

Learn more about the BirdSpotter photo contest at feederwatch.org/birdspotter.

American Robin by Tony Campbell.

Prothonotary Warbler by Lynda Blair.

Anna's Hummingbird by Vicki Miller.

Broad-tailed Hummingbird by Nell Jordan.

House Finch, the 2013–14 Grand Prize winning photo, by Melissa Penta.

Eastern Bluebird by Glenda Simmons.