FOCUS ON CITIZEN SCIENCE • VOLUME 12

Winter Bird Highlights

FROM PROJECT FEEDERWATCH 2015–16

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Bird Studies Canada / Études d'oiseaux Canada

Seeing double

We are thrilled to be able to share with you this wonderful oil painting of last year's *Winter Bird Highlights* cover (below). The artist, Megan Wilcox, is very familiar with Project FeederWatch because her mother is Kerrie Wilcox, Project Leader at Bird Studies Canada. Megan told us why she decided to paint this fantastic piece: "My grandma asked me to paint a picture for her great room that would match her furniture. As we discussed various landscape scenes, her attention drifted to the coffee table where she spotted the front cover of *Winter Bird Highlights 2015* with the beautiful photo of a Northern Flicker on the cover. So I painted a 36" x 36" portrait of this pretty bird, and it now hangs at her home in Collingwood, Ontario." We thank Megan for sharing this painting with us and for giving us permission to share it with all FeederWatchers!

Cover of *Winter Bird Highlights 2015*

Painting of last year's *Winter Bird Highlights* cover by Megan Wilcox.

Cover: Blue Jay by Joan Tisdale.

Focus on Citizen Science is a publication highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This issue, *Winter Bird Highlights 2016*, 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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Studying Verdin in the desert

BY MAX WITYNSKI, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Banded Verdin nestling.

In the spring of 2016, I was lucky enough to join a research expedition led by Project FeederWatch leader Emma Greig to study Verdin, a unique, desert-dwelling songbird. A Verdin is a little gray chickadee-like bird with a plucky personality, chestnut shoulders, and a yellow face that looks like it is covered with pollen. The Verdin is the only representative of its family, the Remizidae or penduline tits, in the New World.

Our research team hoped to make audio recordings of Verdin and other birds for the Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab. We also hoped to determine the Verdin's rate of extra-pair paternity—that is, how often the "social father," the male that feeds the chicks in the nest, is the biological father of the chicks he feeds. The secret love lives of desert birds are little-known, but our study could shed some light on this "scandalous" subject.

We set up camp in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. I found Organ Pipe to be a remarkably beautiful, but truly alien, landscape. The trees are short and their leaves, when present, are miniscule—an adaptation to conserve water in a land of extreme aridity. During mornings at camp, we spotted Curve-billed Thrashers stealing crumbs while Cactus Wrens scolded us from spiny perches and glossy black Phainopeplas flirted in the mistletoe. In the evenings, kangaroo rats hopped beneath our picnic table, and in the middle of the night, coyotes would howl in the darkness, seemingly mere feet from our tents. Sometimes while we were eating breakfast, a male Verdin would sail over camp, as if he had been fired from a slingshot, to land in a cactus and belt out his "TweedoDEET" song, reminding us of our purpose for being in the desert.

Verdin by Emma Greig (2)

We spent early mornings hiking to Verdin nests. At each nest, we attempted to catch the adults, band them with a unique combination of color bands so we could recognize them later, and take a blood sample from each bird to determine paternity from DNA. We also made audio recordings, did insect surveys, and conducted a playback experiment to better understand how Verdins recognize and respond to the songs of neighboring Verdins, Verdins from distant parts of the species' range, and Old World relatives.

Our most important task was to band the nestlings at each nest, which sometimes was a bigger challenge than it might sound. One nest was defended by a particularly threatening cholla, a cactus that appears soft and fluffy but is actually thickly covered with needle-sharp spines that are painful to remove. Extracting chicks from their thorny fortress and putting them back safely was a delicate operation that required the creative use of kitchen tongs and garden gloves!

Once our assignment was complete, we brought our audio recordings and blood samples to the Cornell Lab. Now, we will analyze the data and samples we gathered and begin answering the questions we set out to tackle. Watch for an update in future issues of *Winter Bird Highlights*—we can't wait to share what we learn about this charismatic desert dweller.

Sara Ann Kaiser

Liam Bergan (in the back with the microphone) recorded Verdin sounds while Max Witynski (front) noted observations.

FeederWatchers observe bird interactions

BY ELIOT MILLER, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

FeederWatchers see all sorts of interesting behaviors while counting their birds, but until now there has been no way to collect these behavioral data on a large scale. Last season Project FeederWatch ran a pilot project aimed at documenting some of the interactions participants see between birds at their feeders. Even though the project started late in the FeederWatch season, we received a tremendous show of interest and data. Thanks to everyone who participated!

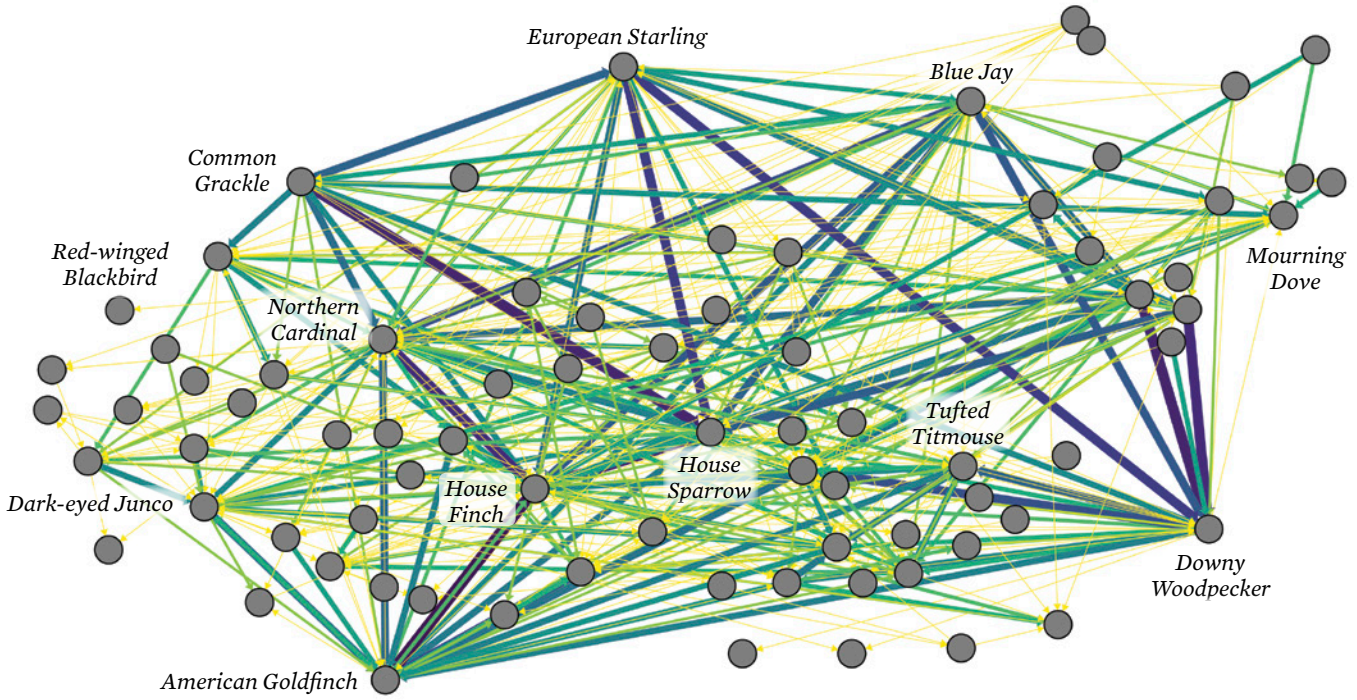
More than 200 FeederWatchers submitted 1,994 observations of interactions at feeders. Most of the reports were of one bird displacing another, 37 were of one bird catching and eating another, and 23 were of one bird mobbing another. There are, of course, many other interesting behaviors we could quantify at feeders, but of the three included in this pilot season, clearly displacement was the most common. A total of 96 species were observed in displacement interactions.

Aggressive behaviors within species

Individual Anna's Hummingbirds, Common Redpolls, and American Goldfinches were particularly aggressive in interactions with their own species. Blue Jays, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and Common Grackles tended to be less aggressive toward members of their own species. These results are preliminary, but maybe species that live in pairs or family groups tend to be more friendly to one another, while flocking species tend to argue more among themselves.

Displacement behaviors

With so many displacement observations reported (see diagram below), the data are complex, but our preliminary analysis revealed some interesting results. It was common for observers to report larger birds displacing smaller birds—Hairy Woodpeckers displacing Downy Woodpeckers, for example. More surprising were species that both displaced and were displaced

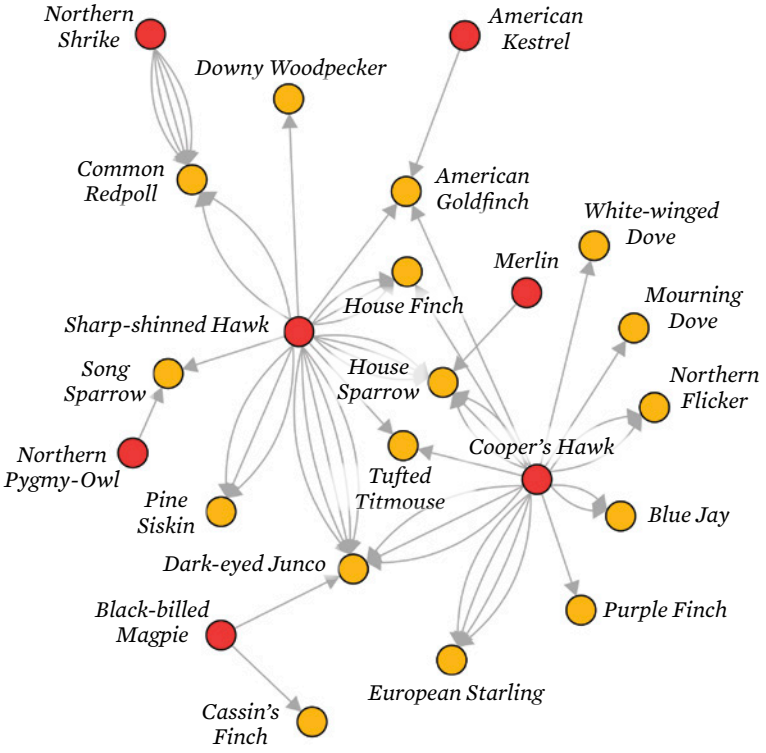


Displacement interactions collected during the 2015–16 season. Lines connect species who displaced or were displaced by one another. Thicker, darker lines indicate that more interactions were observed by the connected species. There were far too many species to name in one graph, but we wanted to highlight a few. Notice how European Starlings are involved in lots of displacements, as are Blue Jays—relatively aggressive species. Mourning Doves, on the other hand, are involved in relatively few.

by the same species, even when the sizes were quite different. For example, Northern Cardinals usually displaced House Finches, but a few times House Finches displaced Northern Cardinals. Other smaller birds routinely displaced larger birds: Bushtits displaced chickadees and Downy Woodpeckers displaced Mourning Doves. What drives the direction of these interactions? We hope to find out with further analysis.

Predation behaviors

As can be seen in the diagram of predation observations (right), Sharp-shinned Hawks tend to focus on smaller prey and Cooper's Hawks tend to focus on larger prey. Furthermore, although much of Sharp-shinned Hawk prey are forest birds, much of the Cooper's Hawk prey are invasive species or species expanding beyond their traditional ranges.



Predation interactions collected during the 2015–16 season. Predator birds are in red and prey species are in yellow. Arrows indicate which species were prey for which predator.

Thank you FeederWatchers!

The level of interest in this project has been extremely encouraging. Our first post on the FeederWatch blog introducing the project received 119 comments. We now have data from all over North America. The next step will be digging deeper into the data and trying to understand what drives the patterns we found. As we build the database, we will eventually be able to look at how these interactions vary across time and space. Are there cases where a species is dominant in one area but subordinate in another? Are there times of year when a species is more aggressive? Watch for announcements posted on the FeederWatch blog or in FeederWatch eNews, and help us learn about the interactions you see at your feeders this coming season!

Sharp-shinned Hawk with European Starling by Karen Burke

Find more details and diagrams online at feederwatch.org/blog/interaction-project-end-of-season-summary.

Northern counts show rising robin numbers

BY KERRIE WILCOX, BIRD STUDIES CANADA

During the past two decades, more and more American Robins have adopted a non- migratory strategy and travel less than 100 km (62 miles) from their breeding grounds in winter.[1] This shift may be because robins thrive in suburban parks and gardens and seem to benefit from urbanization and agricultural development.

FeederWatch data from Canada show increases in the numbers of sites visited by robins and in robin group sizes, indicating that more robins are staying farther north now compared to a few decades ago. Every FeederWatch region in Canada is showing a long-term upward trend in the percentage of sites visited by robins (see graph below).

The trend of warming winters in Canada may be contributing to the general increase in robins at feeders. This past winter, the strong El Niño may have contributed to the large jump in robin numbers in Ontario: 60% of sites were visited at least once during the warm winter of the 2015–16 season, up from 42% the previous year. Similarly, the Atlantic provinces reported robins at 64% of sites, up from 46% the previous winter. Québec had the greatest difference in the number of robins at feeders, jumping from 31% of sites to a whopping 57% this past season. The only province to experience a decrease in American Robins was British Columbia, where reports dropped slightly from 63% of sites to 58% this past season.

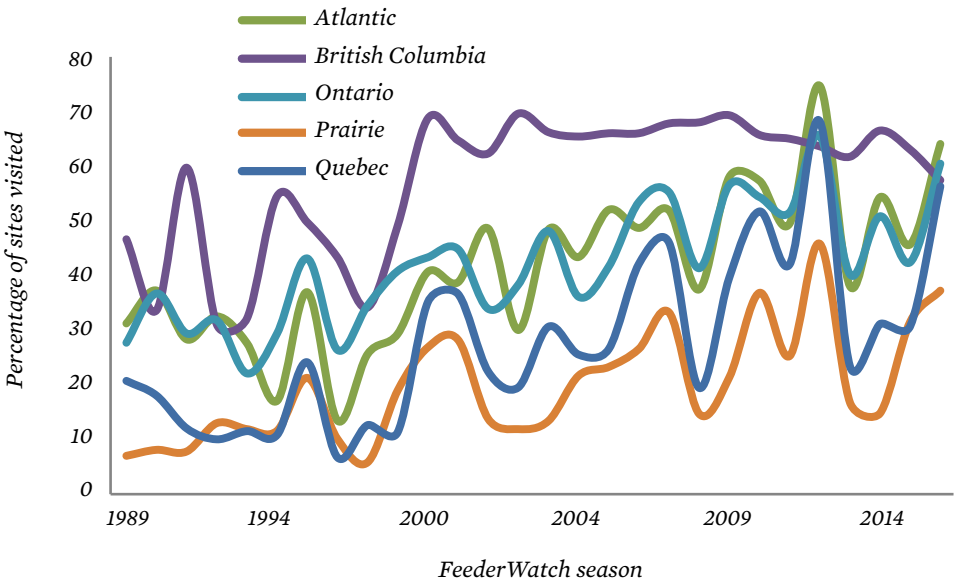
Tips for feeding robins

When first putting out mealworms, it's important for robins to see them wiggling so they recognize them as food. Once the birds are familiar with the feeding location, they are likely to return even if the mealworms are frozen. To put out dried raisins or currants, soften them by soaking them in water first. Offer food for robins on the ground or on a platform feeder.

Food habits of robins

While it may seem like earthworms are the preferred food of American Robins because we see robins foraging on lawns, worms actually make up only 15–20% of a robin's summer diet. Robins often glean insects from foliage or even catch flying insects such as moths or damselflies. Fruit makes up 90% of a robin's diet in fall and winter, although in spring fruit comprises less than 10% of their diet[2]. It is hard to know how often robins take food from feeders, as opposed to simply being seen nearby, but it is clear that at least occasionally robins sample a variety of feeder offerings. Robins' favorite feeder foods include fruit, hulled sunflower seeds, mealworms, peanut hearts, and suet.

Percentage of sites visted by American Robins



The percentage of FeederWatch sites reporting American Robins has gradually increased over time. Atlantic includes Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Labrador. Prairie includes Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

You can help!

Bad weather, such as late spring snowfalls, can force robins to change habitats and move

into suburban areas. At such times, large numbers of robins may descend upon feeders and eat just about anything offered. To help robins during these critical times, try serving dried or fresh fruit and offer a water source. If you would like to create a haven for robins in your yard, try planting native, fruit-bearing shrubs to provide food for robins in winter. Small trees and fruiting plants, such as crabapples, dogwoods, serviceberries, sumacs, and viburnums, are all great choices.

With the expected weather extremes associated with climate change and El Niño years, robins may continue to increase at FeederWatch sites in Canada, and they can use our help!

[1]Brown, D., Miller, G., and Wang, Y. 2016. Band recoveries reveal alternative migration strategies in American Robins. *Animal Management* 3:35–47.

[2]Wheelwright, N. T. 1986. The diet of American Robins: an analysis of U.S. Biological Survey records. *Auk* 103:710–725.

American Robin by Sandra Hawkins

Beyond the backyard

Citizen science prompts conservation action

BY CHELSEA BENSON, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Project FeederWatch is inherently simple. Put out a bird feeder and count birds. However, FeederWatch is so much more than bird counting, and we are constantly reminded of how your work extends beyond pure data collection.

Research from Benjamin Haywood at Allegheny College and Julia Parrish and Jane Dolliver at the University of Washington examined the importance of citizen science as a precursor for conservation action. The research team focused their attention on a program that spans the West Coast: the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST). As part of COASST, volunteers repeatedly visit a beach of their choice to survey for beached birds, marine debris, and human use. They have even collaborated with Cornell University to monitor sea stars for wasting disease.

In addition to collecting data that are directly applicable to conservation issues such as ocean ecosystem health, programs like COASST facilitate participation in conservation at many levels. According to the researchers, "place-based, data-rich experience linked explicitly to local, regional, and global issues can lead to measurable change in individual and collective action."[1] How does this finding relate to FeederWatch? Both FeederWatch and COASST are rigorous citizen-science projects, asking participants to become experts about their location, whether it is a backyard count site or a beach. Through meticulous and long-term observations, participants become deeply familiar with their location, developing a sense of attachment and ownership. FeederWatchers not only identify feeder visitors, but also forecast seasonal arrivals and departures, monitor interactions, and understand the importance of creating bird-friendly habitat. Birds at feeders become "our birds," and we anticipate their needs and behaviors.

Many FeederWatchers go beyond the scope of the project by encouraging others to participate, joining a bird club, and championing the importance of conservation and the creation of habitat. Many become involved in other citizen-science projects, such as NestWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Continue to fill your feeders and count your birds, and we at Project FeederWatch will continue to do our part to provide you with the latest research findings and tools to propel our community of backyard bird enthusiasts onward. Thank you for all you do.

[1]Haywood, B.K., Parrish, J.K., and Dolliver, J. 2016. Place-based and data-rich citizen science as a precursor for conservation action. *Conservation Biologist,* 30:3, 476–486.

Regional roundup

Trends and highlights from the 2015–16 FeederWatch season

BY EMMA GREIG, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

This past season was a fantastic one for Project FeederWatch, with 140,034 checklists submitted from November 2015 to April 2016. Together, FeederWatchers reported almost 7 million birds!

We have summarized some of the most interesting results for each FeederWatch region in the following pages, including lists of the top 25 species reported last season. The "trend" column in the Top-25 lists highlight how a species' population this season compares to its population over all previous seasons, allowing you to see broad, long-term patterns at a glance (two arrows up or down signifies an increase or decrease of more than 10%, one arrow signifies an increase or decrease of 5–10%).

HAWAII OBSERVATIONS

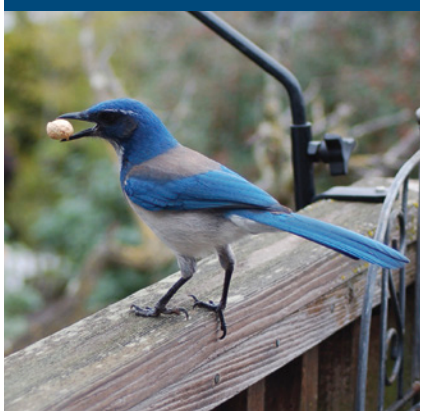
Gary Rasmussen

This past season we received data from one site in Hawaii, and the counts included some excellent species such as Spotted Doves (the most abundant species), Red-vented Bulbuls (an introduced species from Asia) and Common Waxbills (an introduced species from Africa). While most of the feeder birds in Hawaii tend to be species introduced from elsewhere, we enjoyed seeing a Hawaii native bird in our BirdSpotter photo contest: an I'iwi! The photo above was submitted to our "Finches and Friends" category, and correctly so—Hawaiian honeycreepers are members of the family Fringillidae, making them relatives of such familiar species as House Finches and American Goldfinches.

Western Scrub-Jay split

We have an important update for those of you living in the Western Scrub-Jay's range: this species is being split into two. Perhaps you have noticed differences between the "coastal" form (now the California Scrub-Jay) and the "interior" form (now Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay); the California Scrub-Jay is darker and described as having a more bold personality, while the Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay is paler, has a thinner bill, and tends to be more shy and inconspicuous. The American Ornithologists' Union has been considering this split for several years. The split became official after genetic research demonstrated that the two species rarely interbreed where they come into contact with each other in western Nevada. In most of California and all of Oregon and Washington, you will be reporting California Scrub-Jays from now on. If you live in Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, or Texas, then Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays are the scrub-jays visiting your feeders.

Pam Koch

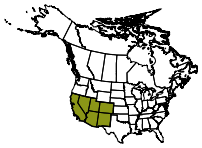


Kathy Johnston

Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, above, and California Scrub-Jay, below.

2015–16 FeederWatch season statistics

- 22,082 Participants
- 140,034 Checklists
- 6,775,487 Birds reported



Southwest region

TOP-25 LIST: 998 SITES REPORTING

Rank	*Species*	*Average flock size*	*Percent of sites*	*Trend*
1	House Finch	6	90	
2	Dark-eyed Junco	5	79	
3	Mourning Dove	4	65	
4	White-crowned Sparrow	5	59	
5	Scrub-Jay*	2	57	
6	Lesser Goldfinch	5	57	▲▲
7	House Sparrow	5	54	
8	American Robin	2	54	▲
9	Anna's Hummingbird	2	52	
10	Pine Siskin	6	50	
11	Northern Flicker	2	49	▲
12	Eurasian Collared-Dove	3	48	▲▲
13	American Goldfinch	5	47	
14	Spotted Towhee	1	37	
15	American Crow	3	36	▲▲
16	Yellow-rumped Warbler	1	36	▲
17	California Towhee	2	35	
18	Cooper's Hawk	1	34	▲▲
19	Downy Woodpecker	1	33	▲▲
20	Bushtit	6	31	▲
21	White-breasted Nuthatch	1	30	▲
22	Oak/Juniper Titmouse	1	29	
23	European Starling	5	29	
24	Golden-crowned Sparrow	4	27	
25	Black-capped Chickadee	2	26	▲

*Scrub-Jay combines California Scrub-Jay and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay

One of our favorite photos submitted to BirdSpotter from the Southwest this year was of a Gila Woodpecker sitting on a flowering ocotillo and trying to capture a bee (below right). Gila Woodpeckers are a fairly uncommon feeder visitor in the Southwest region as a whole, but in Arizona they are quite common and showed up at 45.7% of sites during the 2015–16 season. We are glad to see they are doing well in some FeederWatch locations because they are potentially threatened by urban development and nest competition from European Starlings. According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, their populations have declined by nearly 50% since the 1960s.

FeederWatcher Denise Riddle caught a shot of a Black-headed Grosbeak visiting her oriole feeder at the end of March (below left). It was likely coming in for a snack as it migrated to its breeding grounds farther north. Keeping jelly or nectar feeders out during migration is a great way to get a glimpse of warblers, orioles, hummingbirds, and other species that might not stick around for a long time but that appreciate an easy, high-energy snack along the way.

Black-headed Grosbeak by Denise Riddle

Gila Woodpecker by Susan Beebe

Northeast region

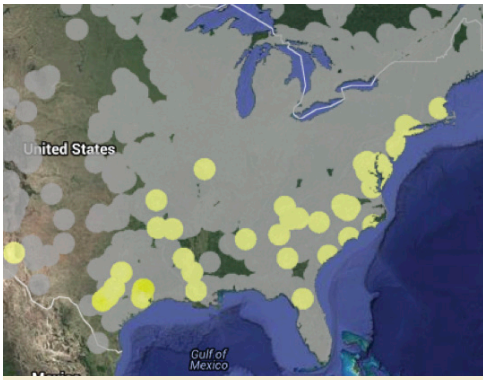
We received several reports of Pine Warblers in the Northeast last season, including one from Pat Davis in Port Williams, Novia Scotia (below right). Pine Warblers will visit suet feeders in winter and look so nondescript that we often get inquiries about what that drab green bird could be. They resemble Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-throated Vireos, and Yellow Warblers, just to name a few, so it is no wonder they cause so much confusion. If you see a small yellowish-green warbler at your northeastern suet feeder in winter, a Pine Warbler is a good first guess. Although this species is still rare enough in winter that we don't see a strong trend toward increasing abundance in the Northeast, in the Southeast we have seen a big increase in Pine Warblers over time.

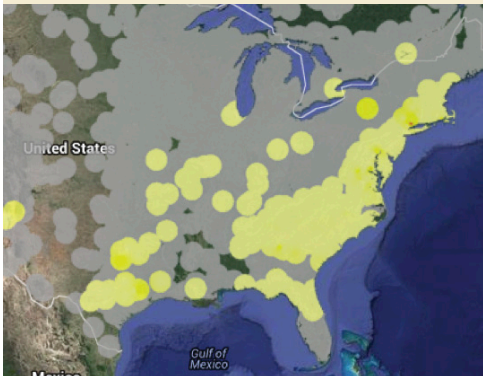
Another winter visitor that is slowly showing up more often in the Northeast is the Hermit Thrush. Although they never make it into the Top 25, since they visit only 2–4% of sites in the Northeast, this species has become more common over time (see maps). Hermit Thrushes are often confused with Wood Thrushes, but in winter in the Northeast, there is almost no chance of seeing a Wood Thrush because they migrate to Central America. If in doubt, look at the back and belly: Wood Thrushes have much more extensive spotting on the belly and much more rufous-colored backs than Hermit Thrushes.

TOP-25 LIST: 6,498 SITES REPORTING

Rank	*Species*	*Average flock size*	*Percent of sites*	*Trend*
1	Chickadee*	3	97	
2	Dark-eyed Junco	4	94	
3	Downy Woodpecker	2	92	
4	Mourning Dove	4	91	
5	Blue Jay	3	90	
6	Northern Cardinal	3	89	▲
7	American Goldfinch	5	89	
8	White-breasted Nuthatch	1	85	▲
9	House Finch	4	74	
10	American Robin	2	69	▲
11	Red-bellied Woodpecker	1	68	▲▲
12	Tufted Titmouse	2	67	
13	Hairy Woodpecker	1	64	▲▲
14	House Sparrow	7	63	
15	European Starling	4	62	
16	American Crow	2	52	
17	Common Grackle	5	52	▼
18	Song Sparrow	1	51	
19	Red-winged Blackbird	4	48	
20	White-throated Sparrow	3	43	▲
21	Purple Finch	3	40	
22	Carolina Wren	1	39	▲▲
23	Brown-headed Cowbird	3	38	
24	American Tree Sparrow	3	36	
25	Cooper's Hawk	1	29	▲▲

*Chickadee combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee





FeederWatch reports of Hermit Thrushes (yellow dots) have increased between 1999 (top map) and last winter (bottom map).

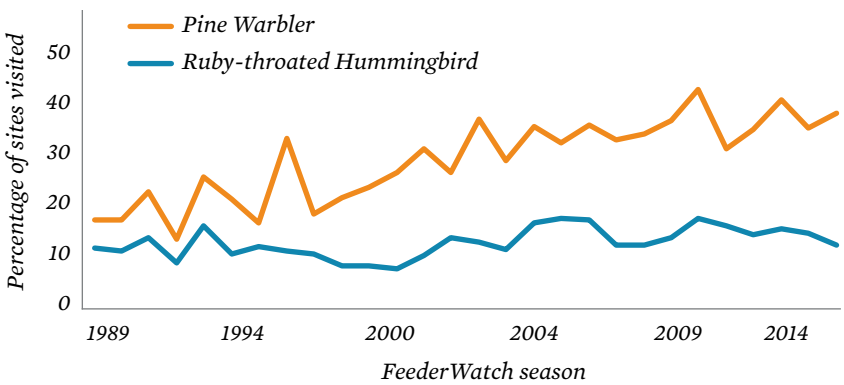
Pine Warbler by Pat Davis

Southeast region

TOP-25 LIST: 1,373 SITES REPORTING

Rank	Species	Average flock size	Percent of sites	Trend
1	Northern Cardinal	3	98	
2	Carolina Chickadee	2	89	↑
3	Mourning Dove	3	87	
4	American Goldfinch	5	84	
5	Tufted Titmouse	2	83	
6	Carolina Wren	1	82	↑
7	House Finch	3	79	↑↑
8	Blue Jay	2	77	
9	Red-bellied Woodpecker	1	75	
10	Downy Woodpecker	1	70	↑
11	Northern Mockingbird	1	66	↑
12	Dark-eyed Junco	4	64	↓
13	American Robin	3	62	
14	Chipping Sparrow	5	54	↑
15	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2	52	↑↑
16	White-throated Sparrow	3	51	
17	Eastern Bluebird	2	50	↑↑
18	American Crow	3	45	↑
19	Red-winged Blackbird	6	42	
20	White-breasted Nuthatch	1	42	
21	Pine Siskin	5	40	↑↑
22	Brown-headed Cowbird	4	39	
23	Pine Warbler	1	39	↑↑
24	House Sparrow	5	38	
25	Spotted/Eastern Towhee	1	37	

Pine Warbler and Ruby-throated Hummingbird reports



The percentages of FeederWatch sites reporting Pine Warblers and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have increased since FeederWatch began.

We mentioned that Pine Warblers caught our attention in the Northeast. It is no surprise they are showing up in the North because they are becoming increasingly common feeder visitors in the South. Over the past couple of decades, Pine Warblers have increased almost two-fold in the Southeast region, from about 20% of sites in 1989 to nearly 40% in 2016.

Another species showing a subtle rise in the South is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. There are increasing reports of this species overwintering in the Southeast, rather than flying across the Gulf of Mexico to their typical wintering grounds in Central America. The reason for these changes in hummingbird and warbler winter distributions may have to do with warming winter temperatures or with an increasing abundance of bird-friendly backyards. Regardless, these two species are doing wonderfully overall, so keep planting native flower gardens and counting your birds so we can keep track of these changes.

Karen Lebing

Rare Ruby-throated Hummingbird in Rodanthe, North Carolina, by Karen Lebing who wrote, "Two birds have been visiting consistently, and occasionally I have three birds."

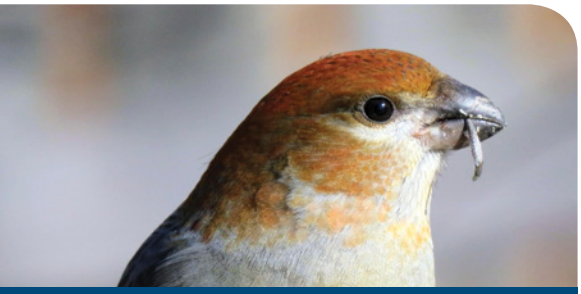
Regina Wood

Like Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, most Black-throated Blue Warblers typically migrate south of the U.S. for winter. Some stay in Florida for the winter, however, like this individual that visited the bird bath of Regina Wood in Palm City.

Far North region

In the Far North region last year Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls, two irruptive species that follow natural food sources, were abundant at feeders, suggesting that many individuals moved south and the few that remained were short on natural foods. Tamara Reiser from Homer, Alaska, sent us a stunning photo of a female Pine Grosbeak and wrote, "We had an abundance of Pine Grosbeaks in the spruce trees, and they will come to feeders for sunflower seeds."

In the Aleutian Islands, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches stay for the winter. James Dickson from Unalaska, Alaska, sent us some striking photos of large winter flocks visiting his feeders. Rosy-finches live in extreme environments, favoring open ground on the tops of mountains. There are three species of rosy-finch in North America. They hybridize where their ranges overlap (primarily in Colorado), making them difficult to distinguish. In the Far North, however, it is easy, because only the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch ventures into such harsh northern latitudes.



TAMARA REISER

One of the Pine Grosbeaks visiting the feeders of Tamara Reiser in Homer, Alaska, last winter.

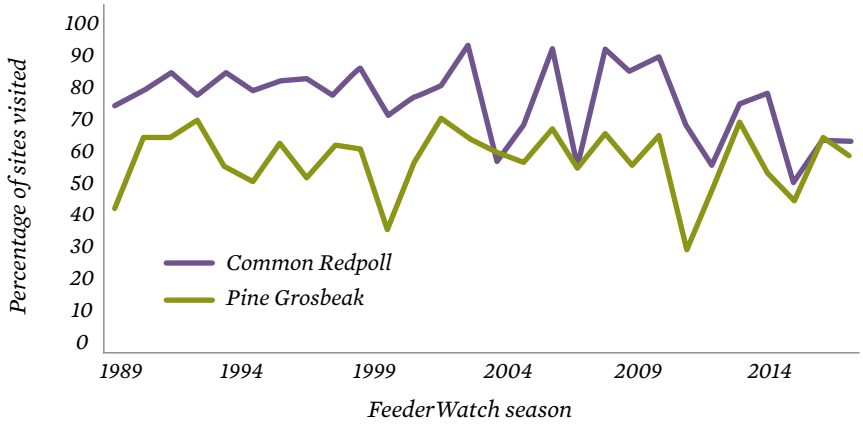
JAMES DICKSON

Some of the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches that visited the feeder of James Dickson in Unalaska, Alaska, last winter.

TOP-25 LIST: 53 SITES REPORTING

Rank	*Species*	*Average flock size*	*Percent of sites*	*Trend*
1	Black-capped Chickadee	5	83	
2	Common Redpoll	9	64	↓↓
3	Black-billed Magpie	2	64	
4	Boreal Chickadee	2	62	
5	Pine Grosbeak	6	60	↓
6	Red-breasted Nuthatch	2	60	
7	Hairy Woodpecker	1	57	↓
8	Gray Jay	2	51	↓↓
9	Downy Woodpecker	1	49	↓
10	Common Raven	2	43	↓↓
11	Dark-eyed Junco	6	40	
12	Steller's Jay	3	36	↓
13	Hoary Redpoll	3	28	
14	Pine Siskin	20	19	
15	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	6	19	
16	Northern Shrike	1	19	
17	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	17	
18	Ruffed Grouse	1	13	
19	Bohemian Waxwing	19	11	↓
20	American Robin	8	11	↓
21	Bald Eagle	2	11	
22	Northwestern Crow	12	9	
23	Red Crossbill	3	9	
24	Song Sparrow	2	9	
25	Brown Creeper	1	9	

Common Redpoll and Pine Grosbeak reports



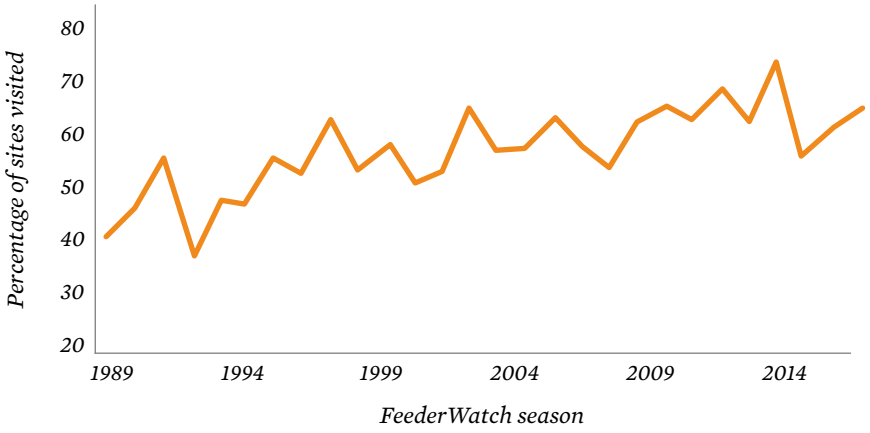
The pattern of Common Redpoll and Pine Grosbeak reports is irruptive over time, with peaks in some years and dips in other years.

Northwest region

TOP-25 LIST: 1,092 SITES REPORTING

Rank	Species	Average flock size	Percent of sites	Trend
1	Dark-eyed Junco	7	89	
2	Black-capped Chickadee	3	85	
3	Northern Flicker	2	78	▲▲
4	House Finch	5	71	
5	Pine Siskin	6	68	
6	Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	65	▲
7	Downy Woodpecker	1	65	▲
8	American Robin	2	62	
9	Song Sparrow	2	60	▲
10	Steller's Jay	3	57	▲
11	Spotted Towhee	2	57	
12	Anna's Hummingbird	2	52	▲▲
13	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	3	51	
14	House Sparrow	6	47	▼
15	European Starling	4	41	▼
16	Varied Thrush	2	41	
17	American Crow	3	38	▲
18	American Goldfinch	5	36	▲
19	Bushtit	10	35	▲▲
20	Hairy Woodpecker	1	33	
21	Eurasian Collared-Dove	3	30	▲▲
22	Fox Sparrow	2	30	
23	Mourning Dove	4	29	▲
24	Golden-crowned Sparrow	3	29	▲
25	White-crowned Sparrow	2	27	▲

Percentage of sites visited by Red-breasted Nuthatches



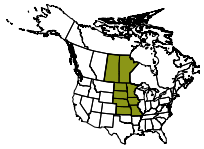
Red-breasted Nuthatches (photo right) were reported at more feeders last season than all but two other seasons.

In the Northwest region, last year was one of the best seasons ever for Red-breasted Nuthatches; only 2009, 2011, and 2013 were better (and not by much). This species exhibits a subtle irruptive pattern, which means that some years they are abundant at feeders and some years they are less abundant, because they follow boom and bust cycles of natural food sources. We loved the photo submitted by Dan Garber of Montana to our BirdSpotter photo contest. "Just a Red-breasted Nuthatch doing its normal thing," writes Dan, "hanging upside down according to the human view of normal."

Anna's Hummingbirds continue to increase in the Northwest, and bird-friendly gardens in summer may help keep them around in winter if some flowers continue to bloom late into the season. Angela Specht, from Wabamun, Alberta, wrote about her summer garden: "I have Maltese crosses, delphiniums, honeysuckle, various salvias, firecracker vine, Chilean glory vines, gladiolas, crocosmias, petunias, lilies, and other plants the hummers love. I mostly get Ruby-throated Hummingbirds but have had the good fortune to have Rufous Hummingbirds and Anna's Hummingbirds visit my yard in summer."

Red-breasted Nuthatch by Dan Garber

Central region



In many states, Northern Cardinals are not much of a surprise and would never qualify as a rare bird. In North Dakota, however, the story is different! Northern Cardinals are doing very well throughout their range and are very slowly expanding, not only north, but also west. Catherine Johnson of Grand Forks, North Dakota, was fortunate and observant enough to find this female Northern Cardinal (below) at her feeders "setting foot" onto new terrain, so to speak. Why are they doing so well? We aren't sure, but it is very possible that bird-friendly backyards are such an ideal habitat for cardinals that they are reaping the benefits provided by people.

Northern Cardinal by Catherine Johnson

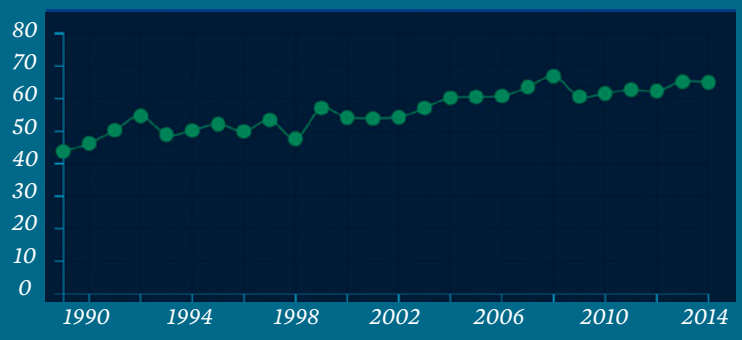
TOP-25 LIST: 748 SITES REPORTING

Rank	Species	Average flock size	Percent of sites	Trend
1	Chickadee*	3	94	
2	Downy Woodpecker	2	94	
3	Dark-eyed Junco	5	90	
4	Blue Jay	2	86	
5	White-breasted Nuthatch	1	84	↑
6	American Goldfinch	6	74	
7	Northern Cardinal	3	73	
8	Hairy Woodpecker	1	72	↑
9	House Finch	4	70	↑
10	House Sparrow	7	68	↓
11	Red-bellied Woodpecker	1	68	↑↑
12	American Robin	2	63	↑
13	Mourning Dove	3	57	
14	European Starling	5	52	↓
15	American Crow	2	48	
16	Northern Flicker	1	39	
17	Common Grackle	4	35	↓↓
18	Purple Finch	3	34	
19	Common Redpoll	14	33	
20	Red-winged Blackbird	4	31	
21	Tufted Titmouse	2	31	
22	Pileated Woodpecker	1	29	↑
23	White-throated Sparrow	3	28	↑
24	Pine Siskin	3	27	
25	Carolina Wren	1	25	↑

*Chickadee combines Black-capped Chickadee and Carolina Chickadee

Want to see trends for more species? Visit our Trend Graphs!

See long-term winter feeder bird population trends in your region at **feederwatch.org/explore/trend-graphs**.



Red-bellied Woodpecker (pictured right) trend graph for Central Region.

Gary Mueller

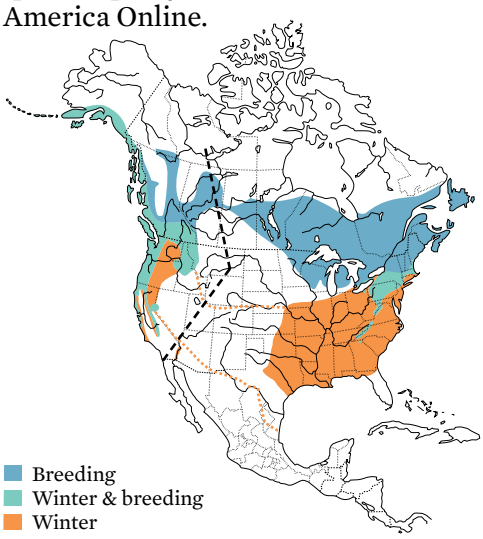
Little brown wrens

Wren sketches inspire a look at wren identification

BY ANNE MARIE JOHNSON, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Inspired by wren sketches (right) sent to us by FeederWatcher Sarah Matthews, we decided to look at wren identification in this issue. This group of "little brown birds" gained a new member in 2010 when Winter Wren was split into Winter Wren and Pacific Wren. Thankfully, these two species can be distinguished by range (see map) and vocalization. But that still leaves a number of confusing wrens. Since our space is limited, we will focus on the most commonly confused wrens: Bewick's Wren vs. Carolina Wren and House Wren vs. Winter Wren (also applies to Pacific Wren). These two pairs are best distinguished from each other by the presence or absence of a bright white line above the eye.

Winter Wren range map before species split, from Birds of North America Online.



Pacific Wren range is on the left side of the line and the Winter Wren range is on the right. Birds observed in the area near the range dividing line can be reported on FeederWatch counts as Pacific/Winter Wren.

Sarah Matthews of New Castle, Colorado, sent us a number of wren sketches including sketches of Bewick's Wren (top), Winter Wren (middle), and Carolina Wren (bottom). Sarah, 11 years old, loves to draw what she sees in nature. Sarah aspires to be an ornithologist and said, "To me, a visit to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology would be like Charlie going to the Wonka's Chocolate Factory."

Distinguishing common wrens in winter

House Wren

Troglodytes aedon

- back slightly darker than sides
- relatively long tail
- face lacks distinct markings
- relatively long bill, flanks faintly barred
- elongated shape

Gary Mueller

Bewick's Wren

Thryomanes bewickii

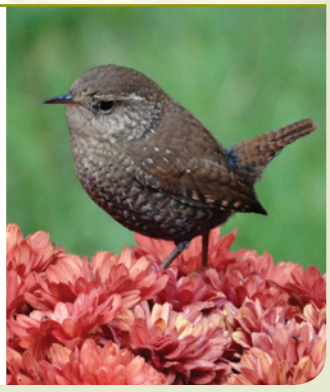
- white or gray chest and belly with some rufous on the flanks
- gray on the side of the neck/upper shoulder
- brown to gray back
- dark legs

Jean Oedewaldt

Winter Wren

Troglodytes troglodytes

- no contrast between back and sides
- very short tail
- faint tan eyeline
- short, thin, dark bill
- flanks heavily barred
- round shape

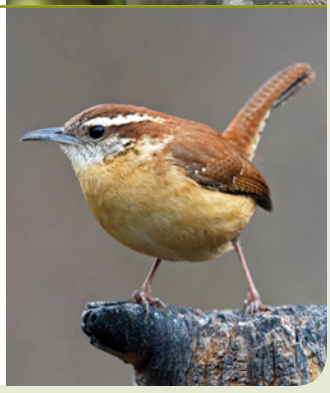


Michael Hayes

Carolina Wren

Thryothorus ludovicianus

- buffy wash on chest and belly
- rufous on side of neck/upper shoulder
- rufous back
- pale legs



Gary Mueller

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Photo contest to celebrate 30 years of FeederWatching

BY EMMA GREIG, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

This coming season is a big one for Project FeederWatch—it is the 30th year that the program has been run across the U.S. and Canada. I would like to send a heartfelt thank you to all participants in the program. It is only because of your time and support that FeederWatch continues to thrive. This really is your project, and I feel privileged to be able to work with all of you to grow this amazing data set.

Because the 30th year is a very special occasion, we will be celebrating with a new variation in our annual BirdSpotter photo contest. This season we will select FeederWatchers who have been participating for multiple decades and recognize their contributions to the program—photos or not! We will also be recognizing participants who submit data to the program, irrespective of how long they have participated. And of course, we will continue to run the photo contest because we know everyone (including us!) enjoys seeing all the wonderful submissions.

Gary Mueller

Blue Jay on Project FeederWatch (PFW) ice sculpture.

Learn more about the celebration on our website, and most importantly, enjoy this special milestone for Project FeederWatch. We thank you for participating and look forward to many more years to come.

Snow Bunting by Iris Macpherson

Your legacy for birds

Contributing data to Project FeederWatch is an important way to leave a lasting legacy. A pledge of financial support through a gift in your estate plans is a way to help ensure that FeederWatch thrives into the future.

To learn more about planned giving, in the U.S. please visit **birds.cornell.giftplans.org** and in Canada please visit **birdscanada.org/legacy.** Or donate to FeederWatch by visiting **feederwatch.org** and clicking on the "Donate" button on the home page.