

Quick-Start Instruction Guide—How Do I Count for FeederWatch?

By following the FeederWatch protocol outlined below, you can ensure that your observations are used for exciting scientific discoveries. Before you begin, please read these instructions carefully. You can find more details in the About section of our website under Detailed Instructions.

Choose your count site: Choose an area that is easy to monitor, preferably an area that is visible from one vantage point. You should observe the same area every time you count. Describe or confirm your count site features every year in the My Counts section of our website or in our mobile app.

Schedule your count days: FeederWatch counts are scheduled over two consecutive days. We recommend that you leave at least five days when you do not count between each scheduled count. The schedule is flexible; if you miss a scheduled count or only have time to count infrequently, don't worry. Your observations are valuable even if you only count once all season.

How long to count: You can watch your count site as much or as little as you want during each two-day count. You don't even have to watch both days! The important thing is to keep track of whether you observe in the morning and/or afternoon and how much time you spend observing across the two-day count.

What to count: Count species you see in your count site that are attracted to resources you provide. Resources may include bird feeders, bird baths, trees, gardens, and other plantings. Don't count birds that simply fly over your count site.

How to count: This part is tricky. For each species, keep track of the maximum number of individuals visible simultaneously during your count. It is important to be consistent in how we count birds so that we can compare records over time. For example, if you see two chickadees at one time in the morning of your first count day, you would record two chickadees on your tally. If you see four chickadees at one time in the afternoon, then you would amend your tally to be four (not six). On day two, see if you can top that! Your final tally for this two-day count would be the most you ever saw at once across both days. For an example, see the "sample counting tally" on this page.

How to keep track of your counts: Use our mobile app or a paper tally sheet to keep a running tally of your birds. The mobile app can be used to keep a digital tally in real time. You can find a sample paper tally sheet and instructions for downloading the app on the Detailed Instructions page of the About section of our website.

Sample counting tally:

If you observed the following,

	Running tally	Correct tally to submit
Northern Cardinal	4 3	3
Black-capped Chickadee	8 4 6	6
Dark-eyed Junco	8 11	11
American Goldfinch	3	3

Keep a running tally of the highest number of individuals you see at one time during the two-day count. **Do not count every visit.** If one chickadee visits your feeder 20 times during your count but you only ever see one chickadee at a time, you should tally 1 chickadee. Note that you **do not keep track of whether or not you see male or female birds.** If you see a male cardinal and then later you see a female cardinal, you still tally 1 cardinal. Why? It is important for all species to be counted in the same way so that their numbers can be compared in analyses. Not all species are sexually dimorphic and therefore males and females cannot be distinguished visually. As such, we do not keep separate tallies for male and female birds.

How to identify your birds: Do your best to identify all the species you see in your count site during your counts. Use FeederWatch's Common Feeder Birds poster, a field guide, or the free Merlin ID app from the Cornell Lab to help with identification. If you would like a digital copy of a sparrow or finch identification poster, please send us email at feederwatch@cornell.edu. Find more bird identification tips on our Detailed Instructions page.

Optional additional data: In addition to your bird counts, you can report observations of mammals, sick or dead birds, and behavioral interactions related to displacement or predation attempts. Find instructions for these additional types of data on the Detailed Instructions page of the About section of our website.

Submit your counts: If you tallied your counts on paper, enter them in the My Counts section of our website. If you tallied your counts on the mobile app, be sure to click the submit button when you are done with your count. Thank you for sharing your observations with us!

**Try the free FeederWatch mobile app to tally and submit your counts.
Learn more at feederwatch.org/about/feederwatch-app.**