Backyard Birds Open a Window on Science

ACROSS THE CONTINENT, PROJECT FEEDERWATCH CELEBRATES A QUARTER-CENTURY OF FEEDING CURIOSITY

FeederWatch takes the memories and

have drawn on Project FeederWatch data to

If you're already a FeederWatcher, thank

you for helping us understand winter birds

the project and take part in what has become

Tf you keep bird feeders, you're keep- privy to many memorable sightings, from ing an eye on the natural world-and misguided European finches turning up in Lyou can use what you see to help ex- North America to the perennial anticipation tend the reach of science. More than 15,000 of the winter's first siskin, redpoll, crossbill, people do that each year as part of Project or nuthatch. FeederWatch, which begins its 25th year on November 12. The combined data all those highlights at your own feeder and, by com-FeederWatchers have sent in-on just over bining them with thousands of others, finds 100 million individual birds so far-have extra meaning in them. To date, nearly two made it a resoundingly successful citizen- dozen peer-reviewed scientific publications science project.

The data have helped scientists under- explore subjects including seed choice, disstand the rhythms of bird irruptions, trace ease dynamics, predation by cats and hawks, the course of emerging diseases, and get a and the emerging effects of climate change. handle on sudden population changes, like the seemingly unstoppable expansion of the Eurasian Collared-Dove or, more worryingly, better. To the millions of others who keep the unexplained decline of the magnificent feeders, we extend a warm invitation to join Evening Grosbeak.

Over the years, FeederWatchers have been an annual pleasure for many participants.

Left to right: American Tree

Sparrow, White-crowned White-throated Spar

Learn more: www.feederwatch.org

Dark-eved Junco (slate-colored for)

Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon form)



Seed Preference Tests

In **1993** a study finally put hard numbers to the question of what kinds of seed birds like. FeederWatchers sent data from 5,000 locations, helping our researchers discover that whereas black oil sunflower seed is beloved among tree-living birds such as chickadees and finches, ground-foragers such as

Top Movers

In the last 25 years, a few birds have dramatically expanded their ranges. Redbellied Woodpeckers and Carolina Wrens have pushed northward and now regularly spend winters in New England, possibly because of changing climate or the growing popularity of birdfeeding.



Presenting the All-Time #1 Feeder Bird

At feeders all over the continent, one bird towers above all others, at least in terms of occurrence. The Dark-eyed Junco visits more than 80 percent of all FeederWatchers in any given year. In any of its forms (the "slate-colored" and "Oregon" are the most widespread), this plucky little snowbird is the perennial feeder champion.



Monitoring Disease

2000

FeederWatchers have been indispensable at discovering and tracking bird diseases. In 1994 they discovered House Finch eye disease, which cut the eastern North American population of House Finches in half as it spread across the continent. FeederWatchers helped track West Nile virus as it spread, too, and in 2002 their data helped estimate the disease's heavy toll on crows and jays. Since then, FeederWatchers have been equally crucial in recording population recoveries.

What's in the FeederWatch Kit?

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey, and anyone can do it: children, families, teachers and students, retirees, coworkers on lunch breaks, nature centers, and more. Participants count birds at their feeders from November to early April on two consecutive days as often as once a week, then send us their data. Join up and we'll send you a kit with everything you need:

- Handbook and instructions with tips for attracting birds to your yard.
- FeederWatch calendar for planning count days, illustrated with participants' photos.
- "Common Feeder Birds" poster with more than 30 illustrations by field-guide artist Larry McQueen, including many of those on this page.
- Access to the FeederWatch forums, where participants share, discuss, and exchange help.

A small annual fee, about the price of half a bag of

sunflower seed, provides essential support for staff time, website

Red-bellied Woodpecke

maintenance, data analysis, and materials.

▲ White-breasted Nuthate

How Many Birds Could You See?

Hawaii need more participants.

The more you look at your feeders, the more species you'll see. Though northern winters are quiet, several dozen species are still the norm at many feeders. Farther south, winter can mean peak birding–Arizona reports 85 species on its Feeder-Watch list.* No matter where you are, we need your data to help fill in trends in occurrence and distribution. In particular, the states of Nevada and



Red-breasted Nutbatch

The Dove No One Saw Coming

One of the most common birds at feeders today-the Eurasian Collared-Dove–wasn't even in your field guide when FeederWatch started. In the early 90s it was a curiosity mostly restricted to south Florida. Since then it has rocketed across the continent, appearing everywhere except the Northeast. Last year, a FeederWatcher even recorded one in Alaska.

You'll Likely See More Than You Expect

A host of common birds come to feeders (see map, above, for the number of species that visit feeders in your area). Each year FeederWatchers find the unexpected too, from escaped parrots to national rarities.



Busting the Top Five Myths About FeederWatch

- Ho-hum days are important data. "Predictable" counts are at the heart of FeederWatch data-it's exciting to report a rare bird, but counting common birds-or even no birds-is every bit as important.
- Robins aren't just birds of spring. We think of robins as a sign of spring, but many gather into large, nomadic flocks in winter, even far in the north. You could see them at any time.
- 3. Feeding birds won't delay their migration. The main trigger for a bird's migratory urge is day length. When it's time to go, your feeders won't keep birds from leaving-but they might give them the energy to go.
- Birds don't get addicted to feeders. Birds may visit your feeder every day, but they actually get most of their food from natural sources.
- You are allowed to take your eyes off your feeder. Lots of people travel for the holidays. If you'll be gone for part of the winter, you can still collect valuable data during the time that you're home.

Evening Grosbeak Declines

Birds move over vast areas, making population changes impossible to detect from isolated counts. Widespread, long-term records like those of Project FeederWatch are essential for distinguishing normal population fluctuations from true declines. FeederWatchers' data have helped researchers document this spectacular bird's decline—a 50 percent drop in the number of locations hosting this species over 20 years-giving us a handle on the problem.

