Join Project FeederWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count!

JoAnn Hackos. January 3, 2021 ⋮

Project FeederWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count, two bird monitoring programs sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, are great fun! You should participate. Project FeederWatch is co-sponsored by Birds Canada and covers all corners of North America. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a global effort. Birders of all ages and skill levels are encouraged to participate in these fun, educational and worthwhile efforts.

Project FeederWatch

Bill and I have been participating in Project FeederWatch at our home in Evergreen for 23 years, contributing a total of 346 counts that have included 32 winter species. At FeederWatch.org, we can access the 23 years of observations to understand the changes in the species that visit our feeders in winter from year to year. We can even download the accumulated data on a spreadsheet.

Band-tailed Pigeons at the Feeder
Photo by JoAnn Hackos

The species we have reported include all the Evergreen regulars like Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers and a plethora of our resident nuthatches. But they also include some unusual sightings, such as the Thanksgiving 2011 flock of 11 Wild Turkeys, the one Band-tailed Pigeon that came back early in March 2019, the raucous mob of Clark's Nutcrackers that showed up in 2002, and a remarkable Northern Goshawk that arrived on Christmas Day, 2010, and stayed around terrorizing our resident birds for several months. It is fascinating to look back at this history and to study the trend graphs to see when we were seeing a particular species. It is all great information to have.

Steller's Jay at JoAnn's feeder
Photo by JoAnn Hackos

Here is how it works: The Cornell Lab asks participants to select two consecutive days to count feeder birds, weekly, from November through April. We chose Saturday and Sunday 23 years ago when we were working full-time and we have stuck with those days. We count our feeder birds for 4-8 hours over the two-day period, entering them in the new and convenient online app. The app brings up our location automatically and provides pictures of the birds we are most likely to see at our feeders. We click on the pictures to add the number of individuals we have counted and record the day, snow cover, and total time spent watching. It is very easy and enjoyable, and we can see our results immediately. At the end of the day on Sunday, we submit our totals.

The data from all the feeder watchers goes into an enormous database that tracks wintering birds with locations and abundances, providing critical data for the ornithologists who are monitoring birdlife in North America.

Join FeederWatch; a small fee ($18/$15 for Cornell Lab members) covers materials and staff support and helps support the research. Participants receive instructions for downloading the app or using the FeederWatch website, digital access to *Living Bird*, Cornell Lab's quarterly magazine, and the year-end report, *Winter Bird Highlights* each fall. New participants also receive a Research Kit with instructions, a bird identification poster, a calendar and more.

Looking at the participation map, I see that there are very few feeder watchers in Evergreen. Let's change that this year. If you have a feeder or plan on putting one up soon, please check out Project FeederWatch. As we face another winter of staying home to stay safe, it's a great project!

Great Backyard Bird Count

Pygmy Nuthatch (c) Mick Thompson

Cornell Labs also conducts The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), another fun and educational participatory science project. Unlike Project FeederWatch, GBBC is a global four-day event. In 2021, it will be held from **Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2021.** Birders of all ages and abilities are encouraged to count birds at their own feeders or at any other location of their choice, for as little as fifteen minutes during this four-day period, and then report results online. The Bird Count website includes interesting tools such as real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count. Participants can get an idea of what to expect to see in their area during the GBBC on eBird's website.

Checklists submitted during the GBBC help Cornell Lab researchers learn more about how birds are doing around the world, and how to protect them. Last year, almost 270,000 participants from 194 countries submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded: 27,270,156 birds representing 6942 species. For more on prior GBBC results and photos from prior years, take a look at the GBBC Summary.