

Project FeederWatch Celebrates 25th Season in North America by Kerrie Wilcox

This year marks the 25th season of Project FeederWatch in North America and the 35th season in Ontario, where it began in 1976 as the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey. Fueled by 10 years of success in Ontario, Dr. Erica Dunn of the Long Point Bird Observatory (LPBO), expanded the program across Canada and the United States in 1986. FeederWatch has continued to grow ever since through a partnership between Bird Studies Canada (formerly LPBO) and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. About 15,000 people now participate in FeederWatch annually.

Thanks to data submitted by thousands of volunteers over the years, scientists have learned that FeederWatch data makes it possible to detect and explain even modest shifts in the winter ranges of many species. Seasonal movements of irruptive species and the spread of diseases in bird populations can also be tracked. To date, 23 scientific publications have focused on FeederWatch data. With each season, FeederWatch increases in importance as a unique and indispensable monitoring tool for more than 100 bird species that winter in North America.

The FeederWatch season runs from November through April each year. Last winter, 2550 Canadian birders participated.

Highlights from 2010-11

The numbers of individual birds visiting feeders returned to normal during 2010-11 after the extremely low numbers witnessed in 2009-10. The Black-capped Chickadee, followed by the Downy Woodpecker, were once again the most frequently reported birds in Canada.

In the Atlantic provinces, an average of 56 birds per week was recorded at feeders, compared with only 46 last season. In both Ontario and Quebec, average numbers were up from 40 individuals in 2009-10 to over 51 this year. Numbers of birds in the Prairies (39) and British Columbia (53) were also up from the previous season, but were still slightly lower than the long-term average.

In British Columbia, Evening Grosbeaks made a surprising comeback after showing



Eurasian Collared-Dove/Tourterelle turque Photo: Nick Saunders

sharp declines for the last two decades. Grosbeaks were recorded at 26% of feeders this season, with an average group size of 16 birds. This is quite the change from last year when they were recorded at only 15% of feeders (average group size of 13 birds). The last time FeederWatch recorded Evening Grosbeaks at over 25% of feeders in British Columbia was in 1996. Tune in this winter to see if numbers continue to climb. Anna's Hummingbirds steadily increased again this year, appearing at 26% of British Columbia feeders – the highest ever recorded. They were first recorded in 1989 (6% of feeders).

In the Prairies (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta), Black-capped Chickadees topped the list, visiting 96% of feeders at least once during the season. Eurasian Collared-Doves first appeared in Canada in British Columbia and are now expanding their range into Alberta. This species is native to the Indian subcontinent and first reached the Western Hemisphere in the mid 1970s through a release in the Bahamas. Sightings by FeederWatchers indicate a rapid expansion.

In Ontario, Northern Cardinals made an impressive showing, appearing at 74% of feeders – a record high for FeederWatch. While cardinals are one of the most striking birds at feeders, they are quite timid, and nervously flick their tails and “chip” their mild alarm. Another striking bird, the Red-bellied Woodpecker, was reported at more locations this year than ever before in Ontario, at 22% of feeders, compared to only 3% in 1989.

Quebec FeederWatchers reported a record high number of Blue Jays, which appeared at 91% of feeders, up nearly 10% from last year. Jays prefer feeder foods with shells, such as striped sunflower seeds and peanuts in shells, likely because the shells delay spoilage and can be cached for later. Common Redpolls were in “invasion mode” this season in Quebec, appearing at 86% of feeders, up from just 6% the previous season. In Quebec, they are definitely following the 2-year cycle (boreal seed trees produce heavy seed crops in alternating years).

In Atlantic Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador), Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks were seen in numbers above the long-term averages. In fact, Cooper's Hawks were recorded at a record-high 6% of feeders. Mourning Doves are a favourite meal of Cooper's Hawks. As in Quebec, Common Redpolls showed increases compared to the winter of 2009-10. New Brunswick was a redpoll hot spot, where they appeared in good numbers at 95% of feeders (average group size of 17 birds).

Helping birds is as easy as 1, 2, 3!

Wild Birds Unlimited® invites you to become a citizen scientist by participating in **Project FeederWatch**. Our sponsorship of this valuable program is one of the many ways we support nature and Bird Studies Canada.

To learn more about **Project FeederWatch** (which begins in November), contact your local Wild Birds Unlimited store or log on to www.wbu.com or www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/pfw.

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Rarities

As usual, there were some surprises during the FeederWatch season. Summer Tanagers were reported at feeders in both Deep River, Ontario and Saint-Luc, Quebec – very unusual because these birds should have been in Central or South America! In Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Randy Lauff observed a Black Vulture that actually wandered into his garden shed! Rare in Canada at any time of year, these vultures spend their winters in the southern United States.

A Field Sparrow in Saint-Amateur, New Brunswick was another cool sighting. Field Sparrows typically winter a little farther south. An American Pipit was spotted bobbing its tail at a feeder in Port Rowan, Ontario. Pipits usually spend the winter in the southern United States.

FeederWatcher Opens Home to Snow Bunting Researchers

When Line Perras of Russell, Ontario tallied over 400 Snow Buntings at her feeder, BSC's Quebec Program Manager, Andrew Coughlan put her in touch with the Canadian Snow Bunting Network (CSBN). Rick Ludkin of the CSBN arranged for some of the members of the network to visit her property to trap and band Snow Buntings as part of their efforts to determine migration routes and wintering areas for this species. Line enjoyed watching the research unfold in her own yard, and the researchers are grateful for her interest and support.

Volunteers are essential to the success of BSC programs like FeederWatch. We thank each and every one of our FeederWatch participants. Because of your efforts, we are learning more about birds and the important role they play in our ecosystem. Keep up the great work; you are making important contributions to science and bird conservation.

For more information about the 2010-11 FeederWatch season, check out the 7th issue of *Winter Bird Highlights* included with your FeederWatch kit. Inside, you will find regional highlights, rare bird reports, and tips on identifying some of the more challenging species. If you are not yet a participant and would like to join, visit www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw. The next season of FeederWatch begins Saturday, November 12, 2011.

The Top 10 Birds for the 2010-11 Season in Five Regions

The Top 10 lists are based on the percentage of Project FeederWatch locations in the region that hosted each species at least once between November 2010 and April 2011.

Les dix espèces le plus souvent observées dans cinq régions en 2010-2011

Le palmarès des 10 espèces le plus souvent recensées a été établi d'après le pourcentage d'emplacements du Projet FeederWatch d'une région où la présence d'un individu de chaque espèce a été signalée de novembre 2010 à avril 2011.

British Columbia/Colombie-Britannique

Dark-eyed Junco/Junco ardoisé	92
Northern Flicker/Pic flamboyant	81
Black-capped Chickadee/Mésange à tête noire	72
Downy Woodpecker/Pic mineur	72
Steller's Jay/Geai de Steller	69
Red-breasted Nuthatch/Sittelle à poitrine rousse	69
American Robin/Merle d'Amérique	65
Song Sparrow/Bruant chanteur	65
House Finch/Roselin familier	65
Spotted Towhee/Tohi tacheté	60

Prairies

Black-capped Chickadee/Mésange à tête noire	96
Downy Woodpecker/Pic mineur	82
Blue Jay/Geai bleu	73
House Sparrow/Moineau domestique	66
Hairy Woodpecker/Pic chevelu	66
White-breasted Nuthatch/Sittelle à poitrine blanche	62
Common Redpoll/Sizerin flammé	59
Dark-eyed Junco/Junco ardoisé	45
Red-breasted Nuthatch/Sittelle à poitrine rousse	45
House Finch/Roseline familier	37

Ontario

Black-capped Chickadee/Mésange à tête noire	99
Blue Jay/Geai bleu	87
American Goldfinch/Chardonneret jaune	87
Downy Woodpecker/Pic mineur	85
Mourning Dove/Tourterelle triste	85
Dark-eyed Junco/Junco ardoisé	83
Northern Cardinal/Cardinal rouge	74
White-breasted Nuthatch/Sittelle à poitrine blanche	74
Hairy Woodpecker/Pic chevelu	65
European Starling/Étourneau sansonnet	65

Québec

Black-capped Chickadee/Mésange à tête noire	99
Blue Jay/Geai bleu	91
Common Redpoll/Sizerin flammé	86
Downy Woodpecker/Pic mineur	85
Hairy Woodpecker/Pic chevelu	83
American Goldfinch/Chardonneret jaune	81
Mourning Dove/Tourterelle triste	80
White-breasted Nuthatch/Sittelle à poitrine blanche	71
Dark-eyed Junco/Junco ardoisé	73
American Crow/Corneille d'Amérique	70

Atlantic/Atlantique

Black-capped Chickadee/Mésange à tête noire	100
Blue Jay/Geai bleu	97
American Goldfinch/Chardonneret jaune	95
Mourning Dove/Tourterelle triste	90
Downy Woodpecker/Pic mineur	89
Dark-eyed Junco/Junco ardoisé	88
European Starling/Étourneau sansonnet	87
American Crow/Corneille d'Amérique	86
Hairy Woodpecker/Pic chevelu	77
Common Redpoll/Sizerin flammé	66

Le Projet FeederWatch célèbre sa 25^e saison en Amérique du Nord

Cette année marque la 25^e édition du Projet FeederWatch en Amérique du Nord et sa 35^e édition en Ontario, où le projet a vu le jour, en 1976, sous le nom de l'Ontario Bird Feeder Survey. Comme le recensement connaissait un véritable succès dans la province depuis dix ans, en 1986, Mme Erica Dunn de l'Observatoire d'oiseaux de Long Point (OOLP) a étendu l'initiative à l'échelle du Canada et des États-Unis. Le Projet FeederWatch n'a cessé de prendre de l'expansion depuis ce moment grâce au partenariat créé entre Études d'Oiseaux Canada (ÉOC) (anciennement l'OOLP) et le Cornell Lab of Ornithology. À l'heure actuelle, environ 15 000 bénévoles y participent tous les ans.

FeederWatch est un recensement annuel s'étendant de novembre à avril. L'hiver dernier, 2 550 observateurs d'oiseaux canadiens y ont pris part. Une fois de plus, ce sont la Mésange à tête noire et le Pic mineur qui sont arrivés au premier et au second rang des mentions les plus fréquentes au Canada.

Points saillants de 2010-2011

En 2009-2010, le nombre d'oiseaux se nourrissant aux mangeoires était extrêmement faible, mais la situation s'est rétablie en 2010-2011. Dans les provinces de l'Atlantique, 56 oiseaux par semaine ont été relevés en moyenne aux mangeoires, tandis que ce chiffre n'était que de 46 l'an dernier. Tant en Ontario qu'au Québec, la moyenne est passée de 40 individus en 2009-2010 à plus de 51 cette année. Bien que dans les Prairies (39) et en Colombie-Britannique (53), les mentions aient augmenté comparativement à la saison précédente, elles sont néanmoins demeurées légèrement inférieures à la moyenne à long terme.

Au Québec, les participants ont enregistré un nombre record de Geais bleus, dont la présence a été signalée à 91 p. cent des mangeoires, ce qui représente une hausse de près de 10 p. cent par rapport à l'année dernière. Les geais préfèrent les aliments comme les graines de tournesol rayées et les arachides non décortiquées, sans doute



Sizerins flammé/Common Redpolls Photo: Helena Garcia

parce que celles-ci se préservent plus longtemps dans leur coque, ce qui leur permet de se faire des réserves. Cette année, les Sizerins flammés étaient en « mode irruption » au Québec, où ils ont été observés à 86 p. cent des mangeoires, soit une augmentation de seulement 6 p. cent par rapport à la saison précédente. Dans cette province, les irruptions se produisent manifestement selon un cycle de 2 ans (dans la forêt boréale, la production de graines est abondante une année sur deux).

Oiseaux rares

Comme d'habitude, des observations étonnantes ont été faites pendant la saison. Des Pirangas vermillons ont été signalés à des mangeoires tant à Deep River, en Ontario, qu'à Saint-Luc, au Québec. Ce phénomène était tout à fait hors de l'ordinaire, car ces oiseaux auraient dû alors se trouver en Amérique centrale ou en Amérique du Sud!

Votre participation à titre de bénévoles est essentielle au succès des programmes d'ÉOC. Nous remercions chacun de vous de votre dévouement au Projet FeederWatch. Continuez votre excellent travail. En participant à la mise en œuvre du projet, vous contribuez largement à l'avancement de la science et de la conservation de l'avifaune.

Pour plus de renseignements au sujet de la saison de 2010-2011 du Projet FeederWatch, consultez le 7^e numéro

de *Winter Bird Highlights* que vous avez reçu dans votre trousse. Vous y trouverez les faits saillants régionaux et les mentions d'oiseaux rares ainsi que des conseils pour l'identification de quelques-unes des espèces les plus difficiles à reconnaître. Si vous n'êtes pas un participant, mais souhaitez le devenir, rendez-vous à www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/index.jsp?lang=FR&targetpg=index pour vous inscrire. La prochaine saison du Projet FeederWatch débute le samedi 12 novembre 2011.



Cardinal rouge/Northern Cardinal Photo: Gord Belyea