



Audubon Science

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT



LEE KARNIE/USFWS



DAVE MENKE/USFWS



DAVE MENKE/USFWS



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The Great Backyard Bird Count is a family-oriented, enjoyable,

and simple Citizen Science activity that engages people of all levels of experience and expertise to learn about and count the birds they see during four days at the end of winter. First held in 1998 it now involves more than 600,000 people, who may submit more than 50,000 checklists containing more than 600 bird species and sightings of more than six million individual birds. Participants enjoy watching birds, keeping a checklist, and submitting their sightings online to a central website [www.birdsource.org/gbbc]. They can view lists of birds seen in their local area, detailed maps, and compare their results with those of other birdwatchers. With the accumulation of more information each year, the site provides a picture at the local and continental scale that gives participants a good idea of how their local results fit into a broader picture.

We designed the Great Backyard Bird Count to engage participants of all ages and levels of experience from Scout troops and classrooms to refuge managers and ornithologists, and encourage family participation. As a simple, entry-level, short-term project, this event provides a gateway to other conservation activities.

We hope that by engaging people, and providing them with encouragement and information, we will lead them into a lifetime commitment to active involvement with bird conservation. The goals of the Great Backyard Bird Count are to:

- Involve those new to birding in this Citizen Science activity, by counting birds, using a computer to enter their observations, and then compare the results of their observations with those of others.
- Develop a detailed database that produces real-time information on the distribution of species across the continent.
- Provide opportunities for interactions between experts and those new to birding.
- Use this initiative as an introduction to other Citizen Science activities, such as the Christmas Bird Count.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is predominantly an educational tool, and it provides a useful weekend snapshot of the populations of

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF CONSERVATION BY CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

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GOALS

- Engage citizens in counting birds.
- Empower citizens to take action on behalf of places important to them and important to wildlife.
- Foster a new culture of conservation.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- GBBC has taken place each year since 1998 and now involves more than 60,000 people, who typically submit more than 50,000 checklists containing more than 600 bird species and around six million individual birds over four days in late winter.
- Development of a national network of experts to check records submitted.
- Development of an extensive range of school education activities based on the GBBC website.

FUTURE

- Expand the GBBC program to increase participation from experienced adult birdwatchers through to schoolchildren.
- Increase the number of regional editors to manage the data that are submitted.
- Make the GBBC website even more user friendly.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Take part.
- Promote this event to others.
- Offer your time and skills as a regional editor.
- Make a donation to Audubon.

“During four days in February, the Great Backyard Bird Count engages more than 100,000 people, who typically submit more than 50,000 checklists containing more than 505 bird species and sightings of over five million individual birds.”

Rob Fergus, National Audubon Society

North American birds at the end of the winter period, complementing those from the Christmas Bird Count at the beginning of winter. The resulting information provides details of particular species, such as the irruptions of Common and Hoary Redpolls that move south from Canada in large numbers in some years. The information gives details of distribution and relative numbers of wintering species, and of early migrants. Of especial interest is information of declining species, such as Rusty Blackbird, as well as information about expanding species, such as Eurasian Collared Dove. Every year the accumulation of data makes this information more valuable and meaningful as we discover new patterns, new questions, and new insights.

We involve more than 50 expert birders spread across the continent to help with identification of puzzling species and verify unusual reports to ensure the information displayed is accurate. Their work complements the existing database filtering system of state- and province-specific checklists. Reports come in from all 50 states and all but one Canadian province, Nunavut.

The Future

Our task is to expand the program to greatly increase participation from experienced adult birdwatchers through to schoolchildren. We will increase the number of regional editors to manage the incoming data and increase the educational value of the program by increasing interaction with participants. The website will become even more user friendly, with greater reporting flexibility, and the immediate posting of digital photos of unusual sightings sent by participants during the event.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a joint program of National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.