

# 2003–2004 Project FeederWatch End-of-Season News Note

FeederWatchers from across North America are witnessing a changing of the guard at their feeders as winter melts into spring. Here at Sapsucker Woods, home of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the “Winter of the Hoary Redpolls” has come to an end. The anticipated southward push of winter finches surprised us this year when a number of the less familiar, frosty-colored redpolls joined the large flocks of Common Redpolls. Now these flocks are thinning, moving north with the warm winds of spring. No matter where you live, this is likely a time of change at your feeders.

The 2003–2004 season of Project FeederWatch has come to an end, and we thank you for making our 17th year another successful one. To date, more than 65,000 checklists have been submitted over the Internet by FeederWatchers found across the United States and Canada. The total number of birds counted stands at more than 3.7 million with additional data coming in daily.



Confirmed rare bird reports include a Lark Sparrow in Michigan (top right, photo by Julie Craves), a Western Tanager in Florida (bottom, photo by Dean Jue), and a Rufous Hummingbird in Columbus, Ohio (top left, photo by Joseph Hammond). Dozens more confirmed rare bird reports can be found online by visiting the “Explore Data” section at <[www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw)>.

## Rare birds delight participants

Project FeederWatch is designed to gather large amounts of data, but hidden within the counts are innumerable treasures of interesting encounters with unusual birds. A lost Lucy’s Warbler visited the feeders of Sheila Chambers of Harbor, Oregon, last winter, creating quite a stir in the local birding community (see story on page 3). A Western Tanager visited Fran Rutkovsky’s feeders in Tallahassee, Florida, in January when the bird *should* have been in Central America. A Lark Sparrow is an unusual bird in Michigan at any time of the year, but one frequented the feeders of Darrin O’Brien and Julie Craves in Dearborn for much of the winter. Julie, a licensed bird bander, captured the sparrow and fitted it with an aluminum leg band. Will the bird return next winter?

## All counts are important

Some FeederWatchers certainly do have a knack for attracting birds. Michael Wiegand of Idaho submitted FeederWatch counts ranging from 189 to 1,362 birds during 20 weekends last winter. He *averaged* 140 California Quail, 69 Dark-eyed Juncos, and 97 House Finches! Michael’s experience (and seed bill) is unusual, however. Most FeederWatchers see fewer numbers of birds, and their counts may be characterized as “predictable.” For example, Lucy Gresham of Los Altos Hills, California averaged 9 California Quail, 9 Dark-eyed Juncos, and 6 House Finches. But these counts are the heart of FeederWatch. Focusing on the extreme cases would provide a biased view of bird populations, and ignoring the common birds could be a major mistake (see article on page 2). While we

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are all thrilled by unusual sightings and high counts, it's the everyday observations of common birds that are so important for monitoring bird populations.

Whether your observations were stunning or "predictable," it's not too late to add your 2003–2004 counts to our database. If you haven't already done so, please submit your data by the end of May so that your information can be included in the season summary.

## Time to renew

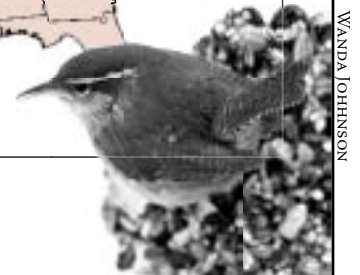
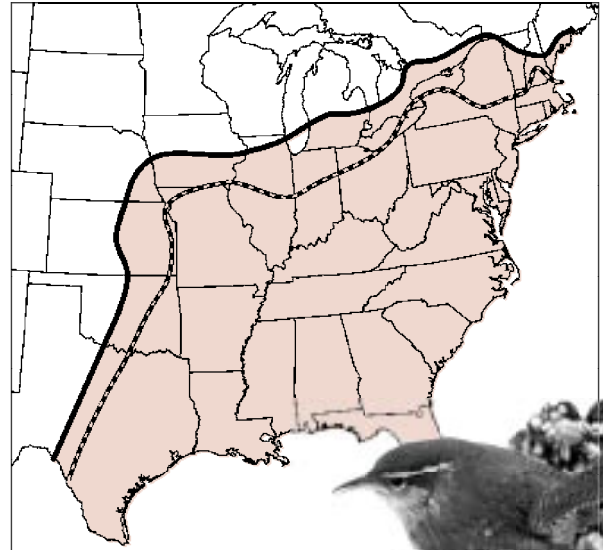
Please take time to renew your participation for next season. Your counts are essential for our efforts to monitor populations of feeder birds. As each year passes, the FeederWatch database becomes a more valuable tool for science. Being able to examine bird counts recorded from the same sites in multiple seasons provides a wealth of information for researchers. Counts from returning FeederWatchers are crucial for much of the research we conduct.

By renewing now, you will save us the costs of sending follow-up renewal notices. Please renew your participation in FeederWatch today by following the instructions on the back page of this letter. We thank you for your continued support.

*Look for a complete summary of the 2003–2004 FeederWatch season in the Autumn issue of BirdScope.*

## FeederWatch Data reveal possible Carolina Wren range expansion

The range of Carolina Wrens has been expanding from the Southeast to the north and west in recent years. Did the relatively harsh winter of 2003 reverse the trend? FeederWatch data will help us learn more. The map below shows the approximate extent of the Carolina Wren range in 1990 (dotted line) and 2002 (solid line).



VANNA JOHNSON

## Britain's regret about NOT counting House Sparrows

In the winter 2004 issue of *BirdScope*, researchers from The British Trust for Ornithology\* shared what they are learning about House Sparrow declines in Britain. They concluded their article with a lesson that is worth repeating:

*"In Britain we are worried about our House Sparrows. We know that in North America they are introduced pests, but we could do with some of yours! We think our story has some important lessons for programs that monitor wildlife. In the 1960s and early 1970s, we thought that sparrows were just a nuisance—they were so numerous and difficult to count that we asked our volunteers not to count them on our Common Birds Census between 1962 and 1974. What fools we were! We lost valuable information at a stage when they were doing well, leaving a big gap in our knowledge. The lesson is surely that we need to moni-*

*tor all our wildlife, particularly the common species. It is these common and widespread species that are perhaps the best barometers of the health of our own environment, as we, too, are a very common and widespread species."*

FeederWatch participants often believe that the Lab is not interested in gathering data about the same old birds, especially when the birds are "just" doves or sparrows or starlings. The Lab needs counts of all birds—as well as reports of no birds—to be able to monitor population trends over time. Please send in your counts, no matter how small or ordinary.

*\*Humphrey Q. P. Crick, head of the demography unit at the British Trust for Ornithology, and Mike P. Toms, organizer of Garden BirdWatch, the United Kingdom's version of Project FeederWatch.*

## Participant Spotlights

### California fires bring a change in birds



Feeder Watcher Herman Paulk

Many Feeder Watchers were affected by the 2003 fires in California. The home of Herman Paulk, from San Bernardino, California, survived the “Old Fire,” which he could see from his doorstep. Paulk described the approaching fires and the aftermath.

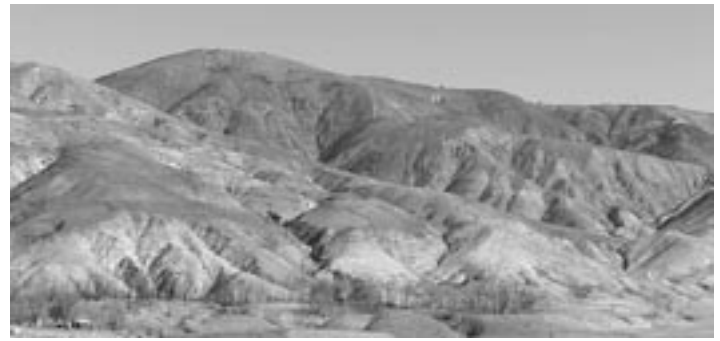
*“The fire had reached the Devils Canyon area and was advancing on all fronts. The foothills to the east of us were on fire and the fire was nearly to our house.*

*“After the fires the mountains behind our house and all along the San Bernardino Mountain area were bare of vegetation. The heavy growth that was once there is all gone, leaving nothing but the burnt out brush.*

*“Right away we noticed we were getting a larger number of California Quail visiting around the base*



California Quail



*The San Bernadino mountains were bare after fires swept through the region.*

*of our feeders. This winter we have had over 100 quail at one time. During my past Feeder Watch counts, my largest counts of California Quail were in the 40s.*

*“We also saw an increase in California Thrashers. We had four or five of these thrashers visiting the feeders regularly. Before the fire this species rarely visited.*

*“Some species, on the other hand, have declined. There has been a real reduction in the number of White-crowned Sparrows coming to our feeders during the winter months. In previous years, my count for this species was in the high 40s; after the fire, the largest number I’ve seen has been 15 to 16 birds.”*

Feeder Watch researchers are hoping to learn more about where birds go after fires as they analyze data from this past season.

### Feeder Watcher in Oregon hosts a Lucy’s Warbler

Sheila Chambers first discovered an unusual, small gray bird in her bushes in January. After looking through her field guide, she thought it might be an Oak Titmouse. Then the bird came to her hummingbird feeder right outside her dining room window. Once Sheila was able to get a better look, she identified a Lucy’s Warbler, the only small gray warbler with a rufous rump.



Lucy’s Warbler

Sheila, of Harbor, Oregon, notified her state’s ornithological society and did a little research. She discovered that her warbler is only the second record of a Lucy’s Warbler in the state of Oregon. Lucy’s Warblers breed in the southern half of Arizona and normally winter in Mexico.

Sheila was worried about what the tiny warbler would eat. Sheila wrote, “All she had to eat here was the sugar water in the feeders. She frantically hunted for insects in the grass while the cold rain was pouring down... I decided to try putting peanut butter on the perch of the

feeders (as shown at right). It took her a while to discover it, but finally one day as she was poking about trying to lick up more sugar water from the perches, she got some peanut butter stuck to her beak. She liked it and gulped it right down.” Since then Sheila has kept the base of the hummingbird feeder coated with peanut butter or suet mixes. A Chestnut-backed Chickadee discovered the suet treasure and has kept Sheila busy trying to maintain a constant supply for the warbler.

As might be expected, Sheila’s discovery created quite a stir. Sheila has been hosting visitors from all over Oregon, and even a few from California, who were eager to see this special bird. Sheila wrote, “It’s amazing how far people will travel just to see a tiny, grey bit of lost fluff.” As of March 31, the warbler was still visiting Sheila’s feeders.



*Sheila put peanut butter on the perch of the feeder.*

# Three easy steps for renewing your FeederWatch participation

## Step 1. Choose which Research Kit you would like to receive

- The **Renewal Kit\*** contains a welcome letter, instruction booklet, paper data forms, and Bird Watching Days calendar. You will have the option of using online or paper data forms for data entry.
- The **Online-Only Kit\*** contains a welcome letter, Bird Watching Days calendar, and tally sheet. Note: With this kit you may **only** submit data online. You will receive **NO** paper data forms.

Your kit will be delivered in the fall.

## Step 2. Send \$15 (\$12 for Lab members) annual fee

- **By mail.** Send your personal check or credit card information using the enclosed Renewal Card. Indicate which Research Kit you would like and return the card with your payment information in the enclosed envelope.
- **Over the Internet.** Sign up by credit card (VISA, Mastercard, DISCOVER, or American Express) over our secure server at <[www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw)> by clicking on the Join/Renew button. Indicate which Research Kit you would like on the sign-up form.

Note: a tax-deductible contribution to FeederWatch above your \$15 renewal fee will help fund bird research and conservation at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Thanks for your support!

## Step 3. Renew by May 30

Your early renewal helps us plan how many kits to print and saves us the cost of sending another reminder. We'll transfer the savings into research and conservation efforts. Thank you!

*\*Please note that renewing FeederWatchers do not receive the FeederWatcher's Handbook or the Common Feeder Birds poster. In addition, participants who choose the Online-Only option do not receive the instruction booklet or the paper data booklet. Every FeederWatcher has access to the instruction booklet and the FeederWatcher's Handbook on the Internet.*

