

The Project FeederWatch

Top 20 feeder birds in the Southeast



White-breasted Nuthatch
by Steve Delloff

*Based on the reports of
citizen scientists from
across the region.*



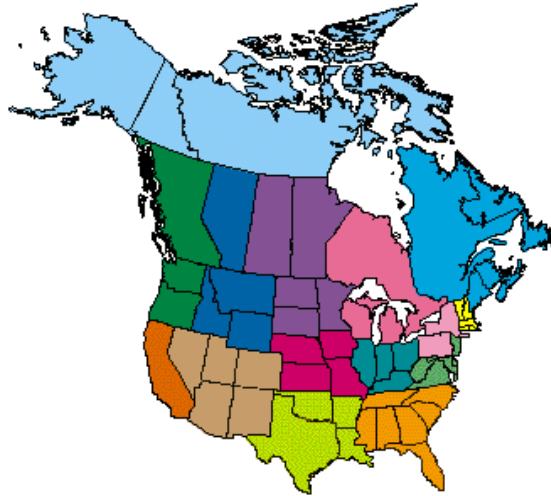
Do you like to watch the birds that visit your backyard bird feeder? Perhaps you even keep a list of these birds. Although keeping track of the birds at your feeders may seem like nothing more than a relaxing hobby, you are actually collecting important information. By sending your counts of feeder birds to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch, you can help scientists learn more about the distribution and abundance of birds.

Project FeederWatch is an annual survey of North American bird populations that visit backyard bird feeders in winter. Since 1987, thousands of bird watchers across the United States and Canada have participated in Project FeederWatch.

The following show is a countdown of the 20 species that were the most frequent visitors to the backyards of Project FeederWatch participants in the Southeast.

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH REGIONS

- North Atlantic Region
- Northeast Region
- Allegheny Region
- Mid-Atlantic Region
- Southeast Region
- East Central Region
- Great Lakes Region
- North Central Region
- Northern Rockies Region
- Mid-Central Region
- South Central Region
- Southwest Region
- California Region
- North Pacific Region
- Alaska-Canada Region



Project FeederWatch counts are divided into regions. What is a FeederWatch region?

If you travel across the continent from west to east, you will encounter different types of birds at different locations along your way. For example, you might see Western Scrub-Jays in California, Gray Jays in the Canadian Rockies, and Blue Jays in Virginia. Therefore, to interpret FeederWatch data in a meaningful way, the continent is divided into fifteen FeederWatch Regions. Each region includes a group of states and provinces that share similar bird communities.

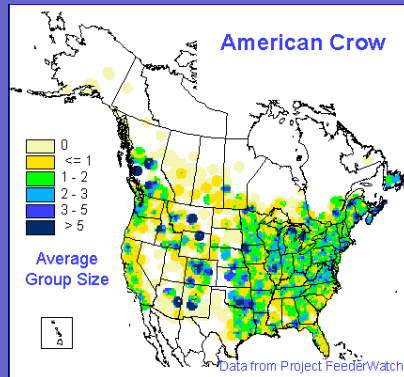
FeederWatch groups the states of Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and North and South Carolina into the Southeast region.

American Crow

Regional Rank #20

- Seen at 47% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.6

Continental Rank #13



Food Preferences

- Meat scraps

In the countdown that follows, all species will be featured in a slide similar to this one.

The slides provide a map, based on FeederWatch reports, of where the species can be seen in the winter.

The slides also highlight a few key statistics telling us how common the birds are in the region. For instance...

Regional Rank #20

- Seen at 47% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.6

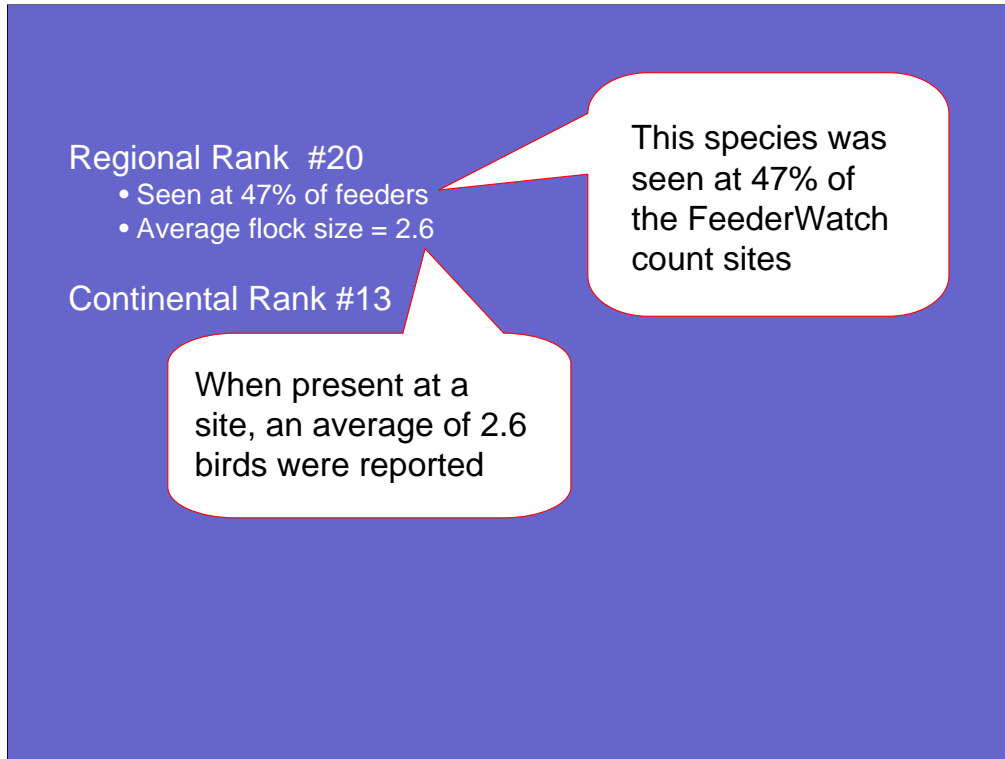
Continental Rank #13

This species was the 20th most commonly reported bird in **your region**

This same species was the 13th most commonly reported bird in **North America**

The Regional Rank refers to how common the species is at feeders in your region.

The Continental Rank refers to how common this species is at feeders when considering all of the United States and Canada.



Also included on each bird slide is information on the **percentage of feeders visited** and **average group size**. The percentage of feeders visited tells what percentage of FeederWatchers in the region reported this species at least once during the winter, thus describing how widely a species is distributed.

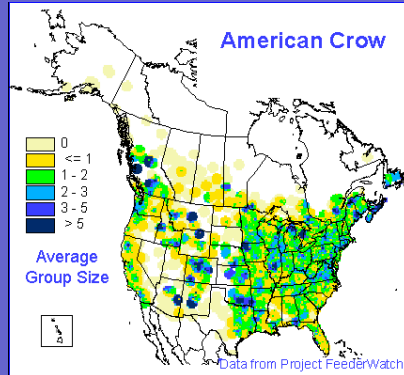
The average group size indicates the average number of individuals of a species seen at one time in a feeder area. This tells us how abundant a bird is when that species is present at a count site.

American Crow

Regional Rank #20

- Seen at 47% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.6

Continental Rank #13



Food Preferences

- Meat scraps

Preferred feeder:

- Ground
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

- American Crows congregate in large numbers in winter to sleep in communal roosts. These roosts can include several thousand crows. Some roosts have gathered in the same general area for well over 100 years.

Cool Facts:

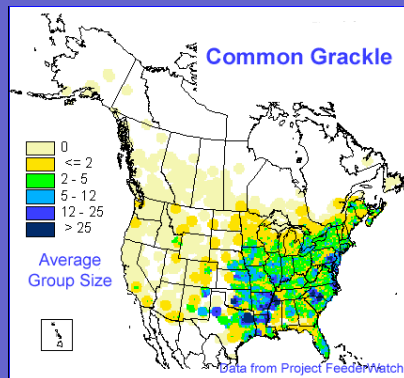
- The American Crow is highly susceptible to West Nile virus, a disease recently introduced to North America. Crows tested in the laboratory generally die within one week of infection, and few seem able to survive exposure. Recent declines in crow populations in many areas are likely due to mortality from West Nile virus.
- Most crows nesting in the United States are permanent residents. Each family maintains a large territory, shared by the adult pair and several of their offspring from previous years. Young crows may remain with their parents to help raise their younger siblings.

Common Grackle

Regional Rank #19

- Seen at 49% of feeders
- Average flock size = 5.0

Continental Rank #18



Food Preferences

- Mixed seed
- Suet

Preferred feeders:

- Ground
- Suet

Winter Behavior:

- During the winter, grackles gather in roosts each evening. When they flock with several other species, roosts can include up to one million birds.
- Most northern-nesting grackles migrate south for the winter. In the spring they are early migrants, and populations are sometimes hard hit by late-spring snowstorms.

Cool Facts:

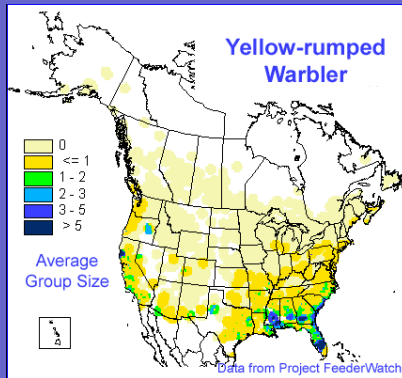
- The Common Grackle is an opportunistic forager, taking advantage of whatever food sources it can find. It will follow plows for invertebrates and mice, wade into water to catch small fish, and sometimes kill and eat birds, particularly nestlings.
- The vast majority of a grackle's diet during the winter is grain left in the fields after mechanical harvesting. Grackles also depend on chestnuts, beechnuts, and acorns.

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Regional Rank #18

- Seen at 50% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.0

Continental Rank #40



Milne

Food Preferences

- Suet

Preferred feeder:

- Suet

Winter Behavior:

- Most North American warblers spend the winter in Central or South America, so the fact that many Yellow-rumped Warblers go no farther than the southeastern United States makes them unusual. Yellow-rumped Warblers can stay farther north because they are the only warbler able to digest the waxes found in bayberry and wax myrtle fruits. These fruits are an important part of their winter diet.

Cool Fact:

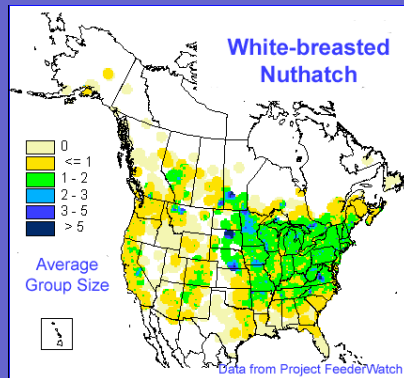
- The Yellow-rumped Warbler is one of the most common warblers in North America. Although other warblers have yellow rumps, none are as conspicuous as in this species.

White-breasted Nuthatch

Regional Rank #17

- Seen at 51% of feeders
- Average flock size = 1.4

Continental Rank #10



H. Key

Food Preferences

- Suet
- Sunflower seed
- Peanuts

Preferred feeder:

- Suet
- Hopper

Winter Behavior:

•Nuthatch pairs defend quite large territories year-round. Territory size can be 25 to 30 acres in woodland and up to twice that in more fragmented habitat. As a result, each feeder site is normally visited by only one or two individuals, although a feeder near a territorial border may sometimes attract three or four.

Cool Fact:

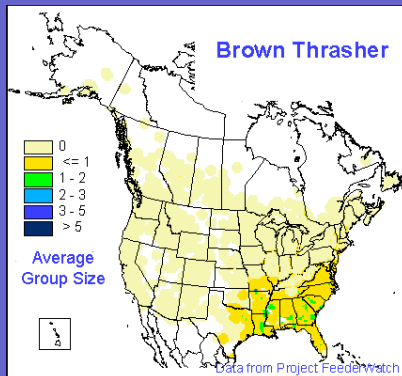
•White-breasted Nuthatches spend quite a bit of their time caching food, carrying seeds a short distance and carefully concealing them in crevices in bark. The male nuthatch, being dominant, may often displace his mate at food sources or steal food she has just cached. As a result, the female is likely to go on caching trips in the opposite direction from the male and hide her food farther away from the food source than he does.

Brown Thrasher

Regional Rank #16

- Seen at 54% of feeders
- Average flock size = 1.2

Continental Rank #45



G. Pettingill

Food Preferences

- Mixed seed

Preferred feeder:

- Ground
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

- Fruits and acorns comprise much of the Brown Thrasher's winter diet.
- Following fall migration, Brown Thrashers set up winter territories in dense shrubby areas. Many squabbles occur among neighbors in early winter, with each ruckus stimulating a short chorus of singing by neighboring males.

Cool Fact:

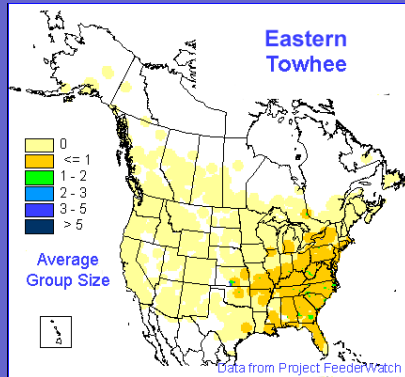
- The repertoire of this thrasher includes over 1,100 songs types and is one of the largest of any North American songbird.

Eastern Towhee

Regional Rank #15

- Seen at 60% of feeders
- Average flock size = 1.6

Continental Rank #31



J. Dunning

Food Preferences

- Mixed seed
- Millet

Preferred feeder:

- Ground
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

- Towhees from northern parts of the breeding range migrate south and form winter flocks. Towhees that do *not* migrate wander widely instead of maintaining winter territories.

Cool Fact:

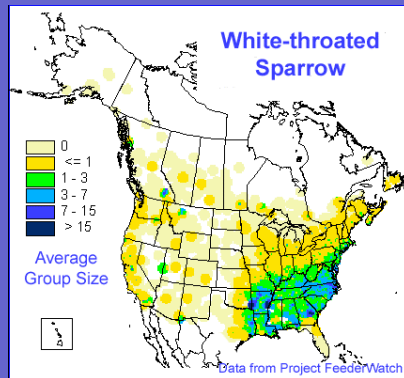
- The Eastern Towhee has red eyes across most of its range, but the towhees in Florida and extreme southern Georgia have pale straw-colored eyes.

White-throated Sparrow

Regional Rank #14

- Seen at 68% of feeders
- Average flock size = 3.9

Continental Rank #19



Food Preferences

- Mixed seed

Preferred feeders:

- Platform
- Hopper

Winter Behavior:

- White-throated Sparrows establish wintering territories and return to the same site year after year. These territories often overlap, and individuals frequently join into loose flocks when foraging.

Cool Fact:

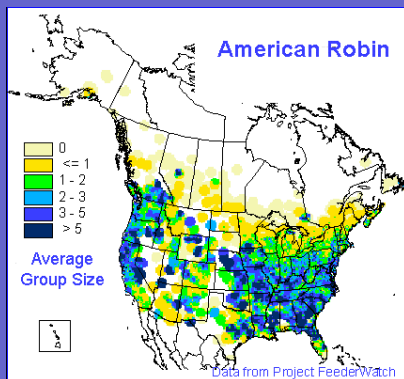
- White-throated Sparrows come in two color morphs: those with white stripes over the crown and those with tan stripes. In most birds such a plumage difference would signify different ages or sexes, but in White-throated Sparrows it is a genetic trait. Youngsters of both color morphs can be raised in the same nest and the color pattern is retained for life. Behavior seems to differ between the color morphs as well. For example, the white-striped birds tend to be more aggressive and sing more often, and the males prefer to mate with tan-striped females.

American Robin

Regional Rank #13

- Seen at 69% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.5

Continental Rank #12



Food Preferences

- Fresh and dried fruit

Preferred feeders:

- Ground
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

- Although the appearance of a robin is considered a harbinger of spring, the American Robin actually spends the winter in much of its breeding range. However, because they spend less time in yards and congregate in large flocks during winter, you're much less likely to see them.

Cool Fact:

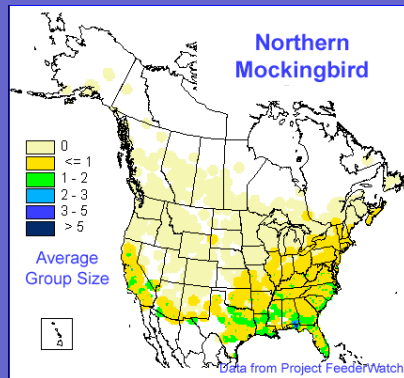
- Earthworms are the food of choice for robins on suburban lawns. Experiments have shown that robins rely on vision to find their prey. The bird's familiar head-cocking allows it to see straight ahead, even though its eyes are on either side of its head.

Northern Mockingbird

Regional Rank #12

- Seen at 70% of feeders
- Average flock size = 1.2

Continental Rank #26



M. Hopiak / CLO

Food Preferences

- Peanut butter mixes
- Fresh and dried fruit

Preferred feeder:

- Platform
- Suet

Winter Behavior:

- Most young mockingbirds set up territories in the fall when pair formation also occurs. Once having staked some boundaries, mockingbirds stay within them for the rest of their lives. In winter the home turf may be split into separate male and female areas, especially in northern regions. Territory size is smallest where there are dense, defensible sources of food.

Cool Fact:

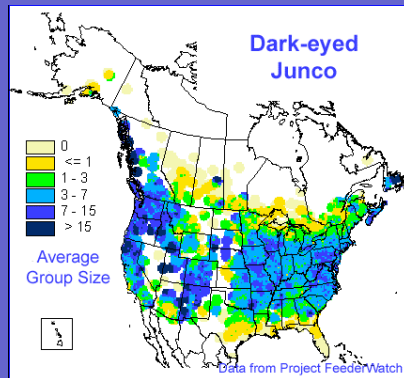
- A single mockingbird may sing up to two hundred different songs in a year—over fifty in one day's concert alone—and the songs incorporate mimicked sounds of other bird species. The imitations are not perfect, but they are often good enough to fool bird watchers into searching for a calling cardinal or jay—only to find themselves being mocked by a mockingbird.

Dark-eyed Junco

Regional Rank #11

- Seen at 71% of feeders
- Average flock size = 3.8

Continental Rank #1



Food Preferences

- Mixed seed

Preferred feeder:

- Ground
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

•“Snowbirds,” as juncos are also known, have earned their informal name on two counts. Not only are they more likely to visit feeders during snowy periods, but their return from far-northern breeding areas is a signal that colder weather is close behind. In fact, juncos are sighted at more feeders across North America than any other species, visiting over 80% of FeederWatch sites.

Cool Fact:

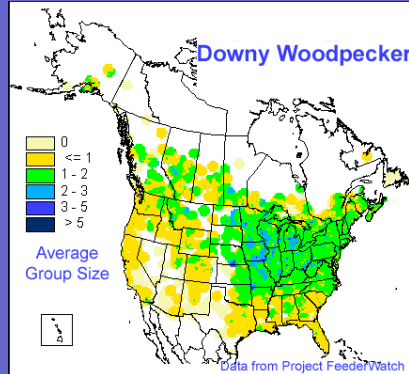
•The sociable junco spends its winter in a flock of up to thirty birds who remain together throughout the season. Each flock is organized following a dominance hierarchy—dominant birds get to feed in the center of a food patch and spend less time looking around for predators. At the top of the dominance hierarchy are adult males, followed by young males, adult females, and young females.

Downy Woodpecker

Regional Rank #10

- Seen at 74% of feeders
- Average flock size = 1.4

Continental Rank #3



A. Topping

Food Preferences

- Suet

Preferred feeder:

- Suet

Winter Behavior:

- Male and female Downy Woodpeckers may stay in the same areas in winter, but they divide up where they look for food. The male feeds more on small branches and weed stems, and the female feeds more on large branches and the trunks of trees. Males appear to keep the females from foraging in the more productive spots. When the male is removed from a woodlot, the female shifts her foraging efforts to the smaller branches.

Cool Fact:

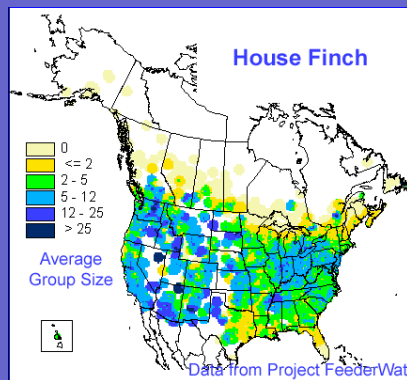
- Downy Woodpeckers defend territories against neighboring pairs, but they are very tolerant of other species. These woodpeckers learn and respond to the alarm calls of other birds.

House Finch

Regional Rank #9

- Seen at 75% of feeders
- Average flock size = 3.9

Continental Rank #7



T. Fauceglia

Male (above)
Female (right)



L. Elliot

Food Preferences

- Black-oil sunflower seed
- Hulled sunflower seed

Preferred feeder:

- Platform
- Hopper
- Tube

Winter Behavior:

- Eastern House Finches have become partially migratory (some individuals migrate, others do not), whereas the ancestral stock, which is from Western North America, is resident.

Cool Facts:

- House Finches were introduced to eastern North America in the 1940s by pet dealers. Threatened with prosecution for illegally selling House Finches, the merchants freed their captive finches on Long Island. From this founding population, House Finches rapidly spread throughout the East.
- Coloration in male House Finches can range from yellow to bright crimson. The color comes from carotenoid pigments found in some natural foods. A bird's color can change if different pigments are consumed prior to the growth of new feathers.

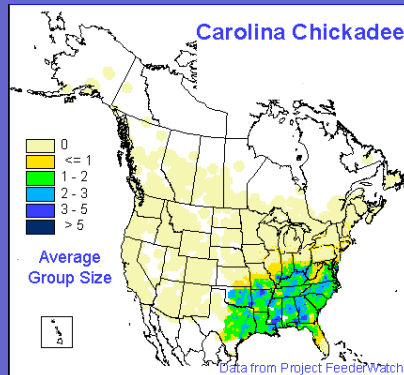
Carolina Chickadee

Regional Rank #8

- Seen at 83% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.0

Continental Rank #2

(Combined with Black-capped Chickadee)



Food Preferences

- Black-oil sunflower seed
- Safflower seed
- Nyjer seed

Preferred feeder:

- Tube
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

- In winter, Carolina Chickadees live in flocks of from two to eight birds and defend areas against other flocks. Dominant birds in these flocks establish breeding territories in part of the winter flock's range.
- Carolina Chickadees are not well adapted to cold temperatures. They rely on behavioral changes to reduce energy costs during winter. In cold and windy weather they spend more time in sheltered habitat, feeding at lower heights than usual. At night they roost in a cavity or very dense vegetation to reduce heat loss.

Cool Fact:

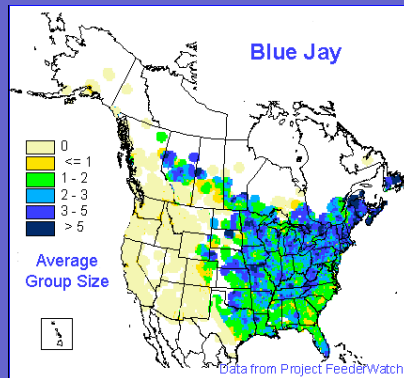
- The pair bond between a male and female Carolina Chickadee can remain intact for several years. However, if a nest attempt fails, a female may seek out a new male on a different territory.

Blue Jay

Regional Rank #7

- Seen at 86% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.2

Continental Rank #6



L. Barker

Food Preferences

- Striped sunflower seed
- Peanuts in shell

Preferred feeder:

- Ground
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

•For the most part, Blue Jay migration remains a mystery. Some jays are present throughout the winter in all parts of the range. Which jays move and which stay put? Although young jays may be more likely to migrate than adults, many adults do migrate. Some individual jays may migrate south in one year, stay north the next winter, and then migrate south again the next year.

Cool Facts:

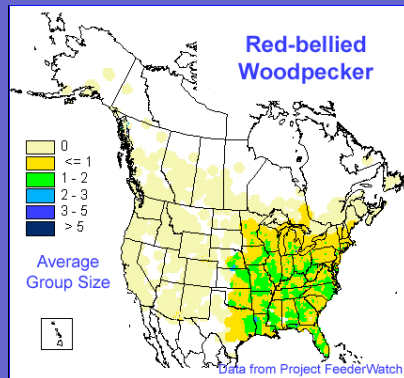
- The Blue Jay frequently mimics the calls of hawks, especially the Red-shouldered Hawk.
- Although Blue Jays may appear to be gluttons at feeders, this behavior is key to their survival in winter. They often transport and store food in caches for later use. One researcher found that the jays he was studying cached over two thousand beechnuts in a single month.

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Regional Rank #6

- Seen at 87% of feeders
- Average flock size = 1.2

Continental Rank #15



L. Barker

Food Preferences

- Suet

Preferred feeder:

- Suet

Winter Behavior:

- Red-bellied Woodpeckers from northern parts of the breeding range routinely migrate south for the winter, and some southern birds may move short distances, as well. However, there has been a noticeable decrease in migratory behavior over the last 100 years, and the Red-bellied Woodpecker's range has expanded to the North and West. Bird feeding may have played a role in this expansion.

Cool Facts:

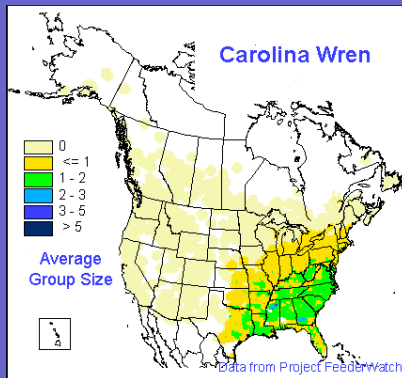
- Unlike Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers do little hammering and probing of tree bark with their bills. Instead, they capture insects hiding in bark crevices with their long, maneuverable tongues.
- The Red-bellied Woodpecker competes vigorously for nest holes with other woodpeckers but it is often evicted from nest holes by the European Starling. In some areas, half of all Red-bellied Woodpecker nesting cavities are taken over by starlings.

Carolina Wren

Regional Rank #5

- Seen at 88% of feeders
- Average flock size = 1.4

Continental Rank #20



R. Elliot

Food Preferences

- Suet

Preferred feeder:

- Suet feeder

Winter Behavior:

- Carolina Wrens are more likely to visit bird-feeding stations than any other species of wren. Although they are primarily insect eaters, Carolina Wrens will consume suet and peanut butter mixes provided at feeders. Seeds and fruits are only eaten occasionally.

Cool Facts:

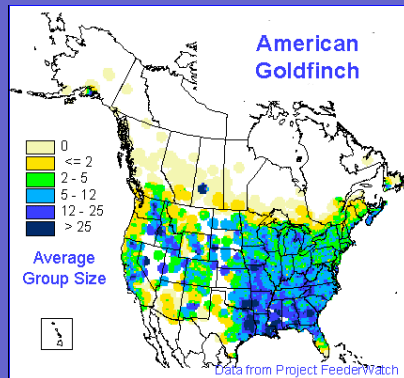
- The Carolina Wren sings one of the loudest songs of any bird of its size. Its song, "tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle," is familiar across the Southeast. A common bird in urban areas, the Carolina Wren is more likely to nest in a hanging plant than in a birdhouse.
- A pair bond may form between a male and a female at any time of the year, and the pair will mate for life. Members of a pair stay together on their territory year-round, and forage and move around the territory together.

American Goldfinch

Regional Rank #4

- Seen at 89% of feeders
- Average flock size = 6.1

Continental Rank #5



Winter plumage



Summer male



Food Preferences

- Nyjer seed
- Black-oil sunflower seed

Preferred feeders:

- Tube
- Hopper
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

- Goldfinches rely on storing food in their crops each evening to provide energy during the night.
- Goldfinches will hang upside down to eat, but experiments with specially designed feeders have shown that they prefer to dine upright if possible.

Cool Fact:

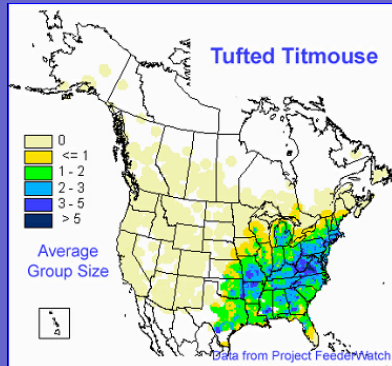
- The bright yellow plumage of summertime is replaced by a dull-green winter plumage—often confusing new bird watchers. This winter coat features a dense layer of soft feathers to provide extra insulation against cold temperatures.

Tufted Titmouse

Regional Rank #3

- Seen at 92% of feeders
- Average flock size = 2.2

Continental Rank #14



L. Barker

Food Preferences

- Striped sunflower seed
- Black-oil sunflower seed

Preferred feeders:

- Hopper
- Platform
- Tube

Winter Behavior:

- Tufted Titmice are permanent residents and defend territories year-round, although they are often joined in winter by young birds. This territorial behavior explains why only a few titmice visit feeders at any one time.

Cool Fact:

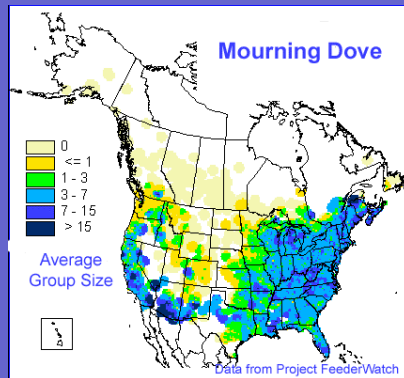
- The range of the Tufted Titmouse continues to expand northward. Bird feeding may play a role in the range expansion.

Mourning Dove

Regional Rank #2

- Seen at 95% of feeders
- Average flock size = 4.5

Continental Rank #4



C. Johnson

Food Preferences

- Mixed seed
- Cracked corn

Preferred feeder:

- Ground
- Platform

Winter Behavior:

- Mourning Doves form winter flocks in November and December. The flocks average about 50 birds but range from a few birds to several hundred.
- Winter flocks spend their days in fields eating grain or small seeds. One patient scientist counted 17,200 grass seeds in a single Mourning Dove's stomach.

Cool Facts:

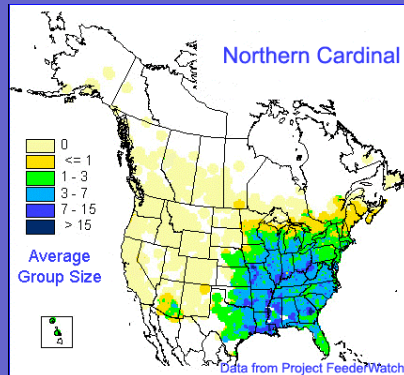
- A Mourning Dove pair rarely leaves its eggs unattended. The male usually incubates from mid-morning until late afternoon, and the female sits the rest of the day and night. A dove may have up to five or six clutches in a single year.
- A majority of the Mourning Doves spending the winter in Ontario, Canada were found to have lost one or more toes to frostbite.

Northern Cardinal

Regional Rank #1

- Seen at 98% of feeders
- Average flock size = 3.8

Continental Rank #8



Food Preferences

- Striped sunflower seed
- Black-oil sunflower seed
- Safflower seed

Preferred feeder:

- Platform
- Hopper

Winter Behavior:

- Northern Cardinals can appear to be timid birds despite their bold colors. Cardinals often only visit feeders in the semi-darkness of dawn or dusk. However, flocking evidently generates a more relaxed atmosphere. In the South, where populations are most dense, flocks of 50 or more cardinals may visit feeders at any time of the day.

Cool Facts:

- The brilliantly colored Northern Cardinal is the state bird in seven states—more than any other species.
- The number of cardinals has increased over the last 200 years, and the species' range has expanded as well. These changes have probably resulted from habitat changes. The cardinal adapts well to park-like urban habitats and has benefited from bird feeding.

Signing up for Project FeederWatch is easy...

- **Online at**
www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw
- **By phone:**
1-800-843-BIRD
- **By mail:**
Send a check for \$15 for Project FeederWatch to PFW
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
PO Box 11
Ithaca, NY 14850



A joint research and education project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bird Studies Canada, Audubon, and Nature Canada.

Are the Top 20 species at your feeders similar to those reported by FeederWatchers from across the Southeast? You can contribute to future Top 20 lists and help scientists learn more about the distribution and abundance of feeder birds by participating in Project FeederWatch.

You don't need to be an expert birder to participate. When you sign up you will receive an identification poster of common feeder birds, a calendar, an instruction booklet, and the FeederWatcher's Handbook with tips on bird feeding.

Find more information online at www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw