

Winter Bird Survey 2003



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Over the past 16 years the Wildlife Diversity Program has been able to track the upward and downward trends of bird species that visit Oklahoma backyard feeders. This has only been possible because of volunteers participating in the annual Winter Bird Survey. This compiled data has created a statewide picture of bird presence at winter feeders from year to year.

American goldfinches continue to be the most common bird seen at feeders. Other common species are the northern cardinal, dark-eyed junco and house sparrow. These species have consistently ranked within the top five for the past seven years.

Some species demonstrate boom and bust trends, with number of individuals wintering in Oklahoma varying in relation to weather conditions and food availability. Birds such as the robin, cedar waxwing and American goldfinch are examples of such species. Other birds like the meadowlark have relatively stable populations from year to year, but they tend to appear at feeders in larger numbers during harsh weather.

Upward population trends are exciting to track. Oklahoma has seen a continual increase in the number of mourning doves visiting winter feeders. In 1988, survey participants averaged less than one per feeder. By 2003, participants saw an average of more than five mourning doves per survey location.

This year's Winter Bird Survey is more historically important than ever before. Biologists are following the presence and expansion of a new species, the Eurasian collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*).

This bird first appeared on survey forms in 2001 as write-ins. By 2002 it was in six counties. A total of 14 birds were seen at six different feeders, and occurrences continue to increase. Last year, 26 Eurasian collared doves visited 11 feeder locations in nine separate counties. Biologists expect this upward population trend will continue.

While 26 individual birds may seem like a small number, it is significant because of the number and distribution of counties reporting the species. The Eurasian collared dove is a foreign species to the United States, and has been on this continent fewer than 25 years.

The Eurasian collared dove may be one of the

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The Eurasian collared dove is usually associated with civilization, primarily areas where they can feed on grain. It appears to prefer suburbs, small towns and agricultural settlements. It tends to avoid unsettled countryside and heavily forested areas.

most adaptive bird species in the world, and its story is a fascinating one. It was originally found on the Indian subcontinent where its range remained confined to a relatively small region for more than 400 years. Then, in the early 1900s, it began expanding westward.

The species first appeared in Romania and Hungary in the early 1930s. It had expanded into West

Germany by 1945, and by the early 80s, the population there exceeded one million. Sometime in the 1950s it appeared on the British Isles; in 1955 the first recorded breeding pair was documented in Britain. The population subsequently exploded to 50,000 pairs within the next 10 years and appears to have remained steady there at that level. As the Britain population leveled off, the species expanded northeast into the Soviet Union in 1974.

So how did the Eurasian collared dove cross the Atlantic Ocean to reach America? That mystery was uncovered by biologist P. William Smith. He and H.W. Kale made the first positive identification of the Eurasian collared dove in Florida in 1986. Research conducted by Smith revealed that the doves arrived here on-their-own from the Bahamas in the early 1980s.

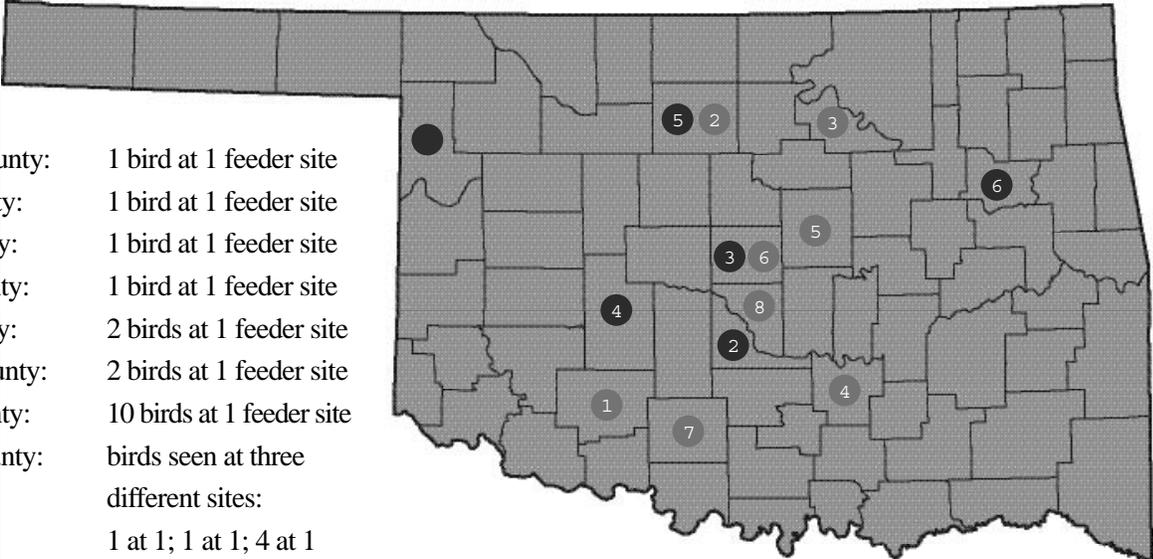
Range map of Eurasian Collared Doves:

2002

- Ellis County: 4 birds at 1 feeder site
- McClain County: 3 birds at 1 feeder site
- Oklahoma County: 2 birds at 1 feeder site
- Caddo County: 2 birds at 1 feeder site
- Garfield County: 2 birds at 1 feeder site
- Wagoner County: 1 bird at 1 feeder site

2003

- Comanche County: 1 bird at 1 feeder site
- Garfield County: 1 bird at 1 feeder site
- Pawnee County: 1 bird at 1 feeder site
- Pontotoc County: 1 bird at 1 feeder site
- Lincoln County: 2 birds at 1 feeder site
- Oklahoma County: 2 birds at 1 feeder site
- Stephens County: 10 birds at 1 feeder site
- Cleveland County: birds seen at three different sites:
1 at 1; 1 at 1; 4 at 1



Smith discovered that the owner of a small pet shop in a village on the Bahama Islands inadvertently purchased 10 pair of Eurasian collared doves. The shop owner had requested “ring-necked doves,” intending to receive ringed turtle Doves.

The owner’s store was broken into in 1974. Frustrated, he closed his shop and released all of the birds. Given the Eurasian collared doves’ propensity for expansion, they quickly dispersed to other islands in the Bahamas and eventually made their way into Florida.

Seven years later, individuals were spotted in the Florida Everglades. Today, they’re in Oklahoma, and it hasn’t even been 20 years since their Florida arrival. The species appears to be flourishing as well in the United States as it has in other parts of the world.

The pertinent question on all biologists’ minds is “what does this mean for other bird species?” There is some evidence of cross breeding with ringed turtle doves that have escaped from captivity or been released into the wild.

It is unknown if the Eurasian collared dove will compete with the mourning dove, a popular game

bird. There may be a negative impact, but each species’ preferred habitats are a little different, so they may not interfere with each other at all.

With its rapid expansion, the Eurasian collared dove seems to be on a continuous trek to extend its range. The species has been added to this year’s Winter Bird Survey form, and Wildlife Diversity Program biologists are counting on Oklahomans to help track their dispersal throughout the state.



Top 10 Species Seen in 2003

American Goldfinch	2,259
Northern Cardinal	1,169
Dark-eyed Junco	1,130
House Sparrow	1,115
Mourning Dove	798
Red-winged Blackbird	710
House Finch	628
European Starling	522
American Robin	518
Blue Jay	458

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