

2009 Winter Bird Survey

By Lesley B. McNeff



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With crisp air and cold temperatures upon us, the time has come once again to set up feeders, sit back near a warm fire and enjoy watching all of our feathered wintertime visitors.

Through the Wildlife Department's Winter Bird Survey, Oklahoma residents help wildlife biologists track the upward and downward trends in bird appearances at winter backyard feeders. Bird populations vary from year to year, and by gauging changes, the survey helps biologists determine if fluctuations are normal as well as indicates range expansions or contractions. It also warns of potential conservation problems.

Six-year Winter Bird Survey participant Bob Curtis, Oklahoma City, enjoys watching the congenial guests that visit his feeders.

"It gives me great pleasure to watch the bird feeders and note the birds that come to snack or gobble," Curtis wrote on the 2007 survey form. "I am glad that there is someone that tallies the numbers of various birds in our great state."

It is help from state residents like Curtis that keep biologists "in the know." Without participants, the Winter Bird Survey would not be possible.

So how does one go about drawing birds to their own backyard feeders? The following are some tips for doing just that.



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Try to mimic nature

The easiest way to attract birds to your feeding area is by mimicking natural settings. Place feeders at varying heights and around varying vegetation. Provide a variety of feed. Different food sources will attract different species of birds. Remember that it is very important to keep a clean source of water available as well, even in the winter.

Some people wonder if feeding birds will cause them to become "humanized,"

or too dependent upon humans to feed them. Evidence has shown that this does not occur. Birds will not stay at one feeder all the time. Most will follow a feeding pattern, flying between feeders and natural feed settings from day to day.

Another draw, separate from simply providing readily available food, is to entice birds to your yard by increasing native plants. Try planting some evergreens or providing a stand of native bushes where birds can find seeds and berries.

By providing a variety of feed, you'll stand a greater chance of seeing several different species of birds.



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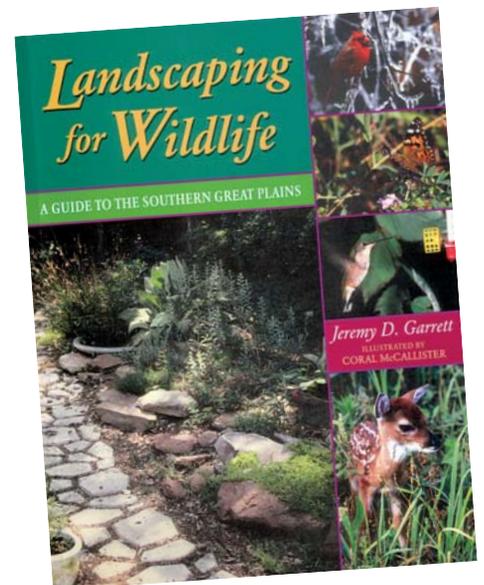
As was mentioned, be sure to provide a source of water. Sometimes birds can suffer more from lack of a water source than lack of a food in the wintertime. Providing that source for drinking and bathing can entice more birds to take up residence near your home and frequent your feeders. In return, you will have visitors that entertain you during those cold months inside.

Landscaping for Wildlife

When they hear the term “wildlife management” many people might think about thousands of acres of rolling plains or densely-forested areas of the Ouachita Mountains. The fact is that there are many things you can do right in your own backyard to enhance wildlife habitat. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has a book — *Landscaping for Wildlife* — that covers everything you need to make your outdoor space more enjoyable and more suitable for wildlife.



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Landscaping for Wildlife focuses on the four fundamental items that make up wildlife habitat: food, water, cover and space. The step by step process spells out exactly how to go about attracting more wildlife. Along with how to create a wildscape plan of action, the book also has detailed instructions and diagrams on creating an assortment of pleasing landscape features. Everything from how to attract specific backyard animals to patio ponds and nest boxes is covered in detail. You can purchase *Landscaping for Wildlife* using the order form in the back of this issue, or by logging on to the Wildlife Department's Web site at wildlifedepartment.com.

Types of Feed

The type of feed preferred by birds is as varied as the species that will visit your feeders. By providing a variety, you'll stand a greater chance of seeing several different species of birds. That will also provide more useful data on your Winter Bird Survey form. The table on this page provides a list of common wintertime birds spotted in Oklahoma and what types of feed they prefer.

How to Participate

If you have a bird feeder in your yard, it's easy to be a part of the Winter Bird Survey. And it is both fun and rewarding to help Department biologists track the birds visiting Oklahoma's winter feeders.

Choose two days between Thursday, Jan. 8 and Sunday, Jan. 11 to watch and record the birds at your feeders. Fill out the survey form and submit your results by Feb. 6. There's no need for a stamp – you can do it all online.

Type of Bird	Food Preference
Blue Jay	Sunflower seed, safflower, cracked corn, peanuts, suet, bread, peanut butter, lard mixes, seed mixes
House Finch	Mixed seed, peanuts, fruit, suet, niger, sunflower, safflower, thistle
Goldfinch- all species	Thistle/niger, sunflower seed, hulled sunflower, millet, fruit, suet, peanuts
Wren- all species	Suet, suet mix, peanut butter, bread, apples
Flicker- all species	Suet, peanut butter, sunflower seeds, fruit, meat, bread
Pine Siskin	Nuts, rolled oats, thistle, mixed seeds, sunflower seeds, sunflower chips, millet, suet
Purple Finch	Sunflower seeds, thistle
Blackbird- all species	Bread, cracked corn, mixed seeds, sunflower seeds, sunflower chips, millet, suet
Robins & Bluebirds	Apples, sunflower seed, bread, grapes, suet, mealworms, berries, raisins, nut meal, seed mixes
Evening Grosbeak	Sunflower seeds, grapes, orange halves
Northern Bobwhite	Sunflower seeds, seed mixes
Brown-headed Cowbird	Bread, cracked corn, sunflower seeds, seed mixes
Cardinal	Cracked corn, nuts, sunflower seeds, safflower, millet, peanuts, apple, bread
Starling	Millet, milo, safflower
Crow	Bread, scraps, corn, suet
Grackle- all species	Sunflower seeds, bread, scraps
Tufted Titmouse	Sunflower seeds, suet, bread, safflower, peanuts, peanut kernel
Carolina Chickadee	Peanut kernel, sunflower seeds, suet, bread, safflower
Nuthatch- all species	Suet, suet mix, sunflower seeds, nuts, cracked corn, bread
Brown Creeper	Suet, suet mix, sunflower seeds, nuts, cracked corn, bread
Mockingbird	Halved apples, fruit, bread, suet, sunflower seeds, nuts
Cedar Waxwing	Berries, raisins, sliced apple, canned peas, currants, grapes
Sparrow- all species	Sunflower seeds, seed mixes, bread, thistle, millet
Dove- all species	Cracked corn, sunflower seeds, milo, bread, thistle, nuts
Woodpecker- all species	Insects, fruit, sunflower seeds, suet, nuts, sugar water
Junco- all species	Millet, sunflower seeds, cracked corn, peanuts, bread, nut meats, thistle, suet
Towhee- all species	Millet, sunflower seeds, peanuts, grapes, cracked corn, suet
Brown Thrasher	Orange halves, cracked corn



Some of the unusual birds at feeders during the 2008 Winter Bird Survey included the ladder-backed woodpecker, snow bunting, Cooper's hawk, American kestrel, and even a ring-necked pheasant.

Last Year's Results

Northern Bobwhite	69
Rock Dove	33
Mourning Dove	740
Inca Dove	67
Eurasian Collared Dove	297
Pileated Woodpecker	19
Red-headed Woodpecker	48
Red-bellied Woodpecker	44
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	32
Downy Woodpecker	169
Hairy Woodpecker	46
Flicker (all races)	72
Blue Jay	369
Crow	242
Carolina Chickadee	589
Tufted Titmouse	429
Red-breasted Nuthatch	102
White-breasted Nuthatch	172
Brown Creeper	53
Carolina Wren	122
Bewick's Wren	85
Bluebird (Eastern)	114
Robin	317
Mockingbird	126
Brown Thrasher	75
Cedar Waxwing	249
Starling	772
Cardinal	1,064
Eastern Towhee	7
Spotted Towhee	10
Fox Sparrow	47
Tree Sparrow	196
Song Sparrow	238
Field Sparrow	187
White-throated Sparrow	108
White-crowned Sparrow	235
Harris' Sparrow	273
House Sparrow	1,108
Dark-eyed Junco	1,449
Brewer's Blackbird	74
Rusty Blackbird	17
Red-winged Blackbird	537
Common Grackle	180
Great-tailed Grackle	48
Meadowlark (Eastern & Western)	84
Brown-headed Cowbird	93
House Finch	667
Purple Finch	314
Pine Siskin	259
Goldfinch	2,316
Evening Grosbeak	10

At the end of each day, record the greatest number of each bird species you saw feeding together at one time. For example, let's say you saw six goldfinches at 10 a.m. Later that day you saw a group of 12 goldfinches. Record 12 goldfinches on the survey form. This ensures that you never count the same bird twice.

Tip: you may find it helpful to print the survey form and use it as a checklist reference during the survey.

If you can't get an exact count, record your best estimate. Be sure to record a number. Entries of "a few" or "too many" can't be used scientifically and have to be thrown out. It's also important that you only count birds you see at or around your feeder area. Even if a special bird flies by, if it doesn't stop at your feeder, don't record it.

Birds are listed taxonomically rather than alphabetically on the survey form

to group similar birds such as sparrows and blackbirds.

Results will be published in the November/December 2009 issue of *Outdoor Oklahoma* magazine.

Enter results online or mail your survey form by Monday, Feb. 6 to Winter Bird Survey, Wildlife Diversity Program PO Box 53465 Oklahoma City, OK 73152.

Last Year's Results: Unusual Suspects

Some of the unusual birds at feeders during the 2008 Winter Bird Survey included the ladder-backed woodpecker, snow bunting, Cooper's hawk, American kestrel, and even a ring-necked pheasant. Other interesting species that were found in yards included the sharp-shinned hawk, greater roadrunner, wild turkey, bald eagle, barred owl, turkey vulture, yellow-rumped warbler, loggerhead shrike and the black-headed grosbeak. 🌿

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008