

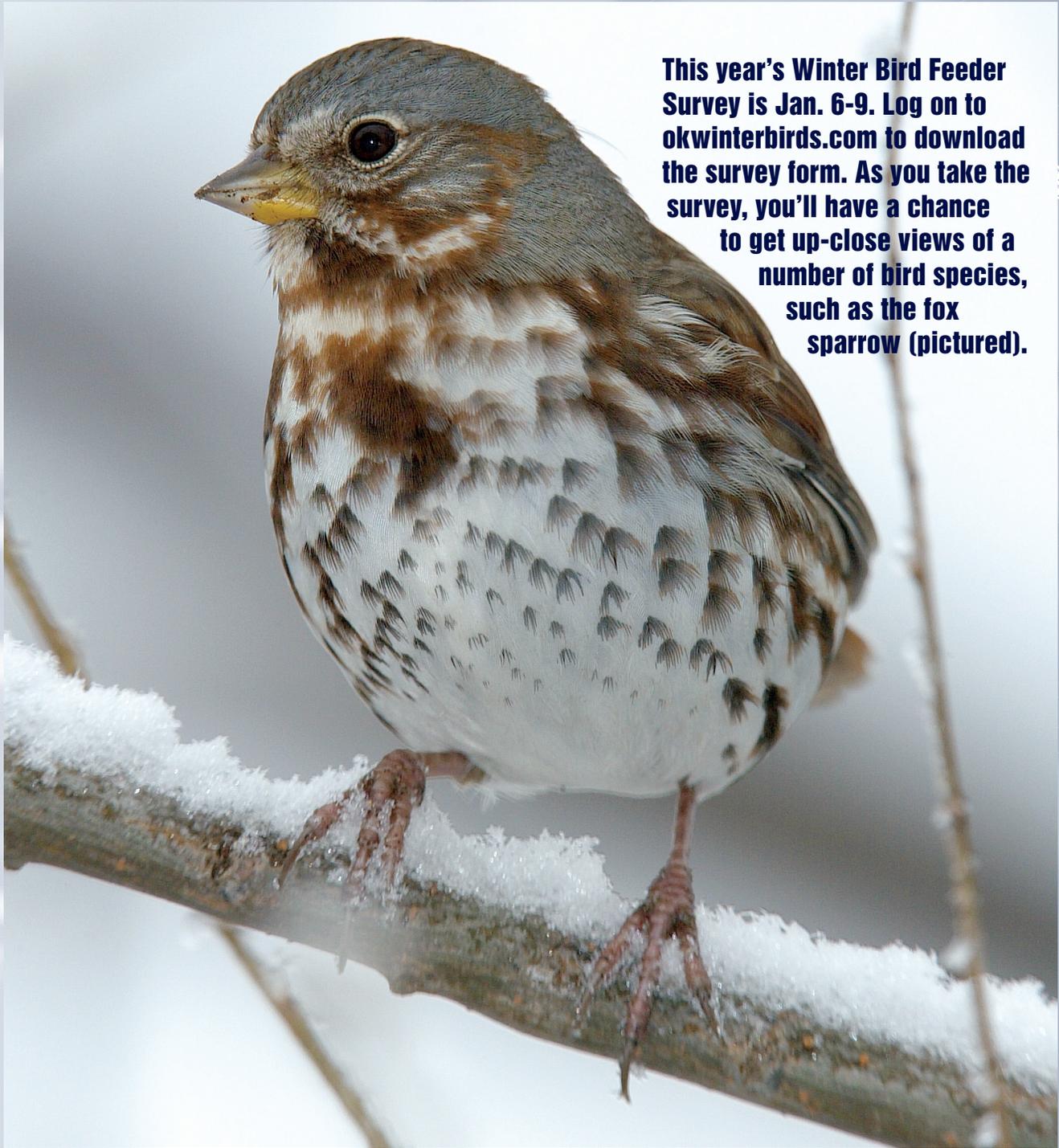


Winter Bird Feeder Survey

**Putting Conservation into Practice
One Backyard at a Time**

By Lesley Carson

Photos by Bill Horn



This year's Winter Bird Feeder Survey is Jan. 6-9. Log on to okwinterbirds.com to download the survey form. As you take the survey, you'll have a chance to get up-close views of a number of bird species, such as the fox sparrow (pictured).

Today birders come from highly varied backgrounds. Some are ornithologists (aka, bird biologists), some are teachers, some are stay at home parents and some are youngsters. Some are even hunters and anglers.

Everyone's experience in birding is different. It can range from

traveling far and wide in search of species to check off of a "life list" to those people who are simply interested in finding out what to call that yellow bird with the black tips on its wings that comes and goes in their backyards.

Birding is a popular pastime not only because it's easy to learn, but also

because of the diversity found on the other end of the binoculars. Oklahoma is known to be rich with bird life. There is a large array of migrant and resident species that make bird watching in the Sooner State a beautiful experience. And viewing this avian parade are birders from just as many backgrounds as the birds themselves.



The Eastern bluebird is a favorite for Oklahoma birdwatchers.

At some point, birders learned that by changing habitats in their backyards, they could increase species diversity and attract more birds to their yards. On the other hand, they could also increase the occurrence of a particular species in their yard as well. Habitat, whether natural or created, is the key to attracting Oklahoma's avian species to a distance easily reached with magnifying scope, camera lens or human vision.

By participating in the Wildlife Department's Winter Bird Feeder Survey, birders in Oklahoma have a unique opportunity to make their interest in birds go from simply watching and enjoying to contributing to bird conservation. It's inexpensive, fun and easy to do.

From a "maybe we could..." and "what if..." idea, the Winter Bird Feeder Survey has evolved into one of the wildlife diversity program's most popular projects. Coupled with similar surveys being conducted in Iowa and Kansas, Oklahoma wildlife diversity biologists are interested in knowing trends and using them to perform data analysis. All of the information provided to them should offer a better idea of bird population numbers and help pinpoint trends.

This year's Winter Bird Feeder survey dates are Jan. 6-9. All you have to do is watch birds at your backyard bird feeder for two days during the survey period. Count birds at least four times a day, and record the highest number of each species that you count feeding at one time. For example, if you look once and see four cardinals, but a few hours later you look and see eight cardinals, then record "eight" cardinals. Survey forms are available online at okwinterbirds.com, where you will

Like Birds?

Be on the alert for a range of bird-related articles in upcoming issues of *Outdoor Oklahoma*, such as the following:

"State of the Birds"

We don't realize how much birds have found their way into our everyday lives. Images of bald eagles conjure up thoughts of freedom and grace, while doves remind us of peace. We use terms such as "proud as a peacock" and "as wise as an owl." About 65,000 people hunt migratory birds annually, and more than 321,000 people watch birds around their homes and on trips throughout the state every year.

Referred to as indicator species, birds often provide insight into the health of an ecosystem. Sensitive bird species can show ecologists which ecosystems need the most help, and allow wildlife managers to begin restoration efforts often before it's too late.

"The State of the Birds" takes you on a comprehensive journey through Oklahoma's world of birds, exploring their cultural and environmental importance.

"Jewels of Oklahoma: A Closer Look at the Hummingbirds of the Sooner State"

Their hearts beat an average of 1,250 times per minute in flight. Their wings beat dozens of times per second. They can fly forward, backward, up, down, sideways and, for very short distances, even upside down. They can also hover in place for extended periods. They are remarkably fascinating, and Oklahoma is home for part of the year for these neotropical migrants — birds that winter in South America but spend summers north of the equator. This article explores each hummingbird species common to Oklahoma, yielding a wealth of information on natural history, identification tips, feeding guidelines, and more.

"The Search for the Yellow Rail"

Come alongside with one Wildlife Department employee who joins up with college students from UCO to search out, study and band the yellow rail, one of Oklahoma's unique bird species. Visualize students as they work through fields by night, catching the birds carefully with nets for surveying and documentation before being released back into the night sky.

Also watch for a range of Watchable Wildlife articles featuring birds you can spot right here in Oklahoma. 🦋

—Michael Bergin, associate editor

The brown thrasher found its way onto survey forms during last year's Winter Bird Feeder Survey.



Significance from Simplicity: How Your Small Effort Can Have a Big Impact on Wildlife

There are over a million people who enjoy watching wildlife, according to recent surveys, and with over 350 species, birds are a natural choice for people hoping to glimpse a little of nature. Birds can be spotted virtually anywhere, whether on a tour specifically organized for birdwatchers or simply while sitting on a park bench or on the side of the road at a stoplight on a daily commute. But one of the easiest ways to see a range of birds is to attract them to your own yard. Once you've done that much, the Winter Bird Feeder Survey is the natural next step.

The Winter Bird Feeder Survey is one of the simplest ways to participate in wildlife conservation. It simply involves hanging a bird feeder or two in your yard and checking them periodically throughout the survey

period (Jan. 6-9) to see what species of birds are feeding. Record your sightings on a form provided online by the Wildlife Department, and submit your results when you are done. It may seem simple, but with so many Oklahomans feeding wild birds throughout the winter, the data they can gather collectively far outweighs what little data a few biologists can gather on their own. This is a chance to turn something as simple as looking out the window into a real conservation effort. So take the challenge this year. Simply follow the survey instructions found at okwinterbirds.com, and bring some extra color to your yard and your life this fall by attracting and counting our state's diverse wild birds.

The Wildlife Department is here to help you along through its online

Winter Bird Feeder Survey website okwinterbirds.com. Along with instructions and forms for completing the survey, you can use the site to find identification tips for most of Oklahoma's winter bird species as well as diets, range maps, feeding behaviors and habitat information. The site also provides recipes for mixtures that will attract specific bird species to your yard and links to other online birding resources.

Through the Winter Bird Feeder Survey, birding can not only enhance your wildlife identification skills, but it can also go a long way in conserving birds for future wildlife enthusiasts to enjoy. Let the simplicity of counting birds bring greater significance to your appreciation for wildlife and our state's outdoor heritage. 🌿

—Michael Bergin, associate editor

also find complete instructions for taking and returning the survey.

2010 Results

Every year produces different results in the annual Winter Bird Feeder Survey. Depending upon the weather, available food, the areas of the state and types of critters that are present around the feeders, winter bird populations can fluctuate quite drastically.

Like every year in the past, some odd species were seen close to feeders. A number of raptors

were spotted, including individuals representing the Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, red-shouldered hawk, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel, bald eagle, great horned owl and barred owl.

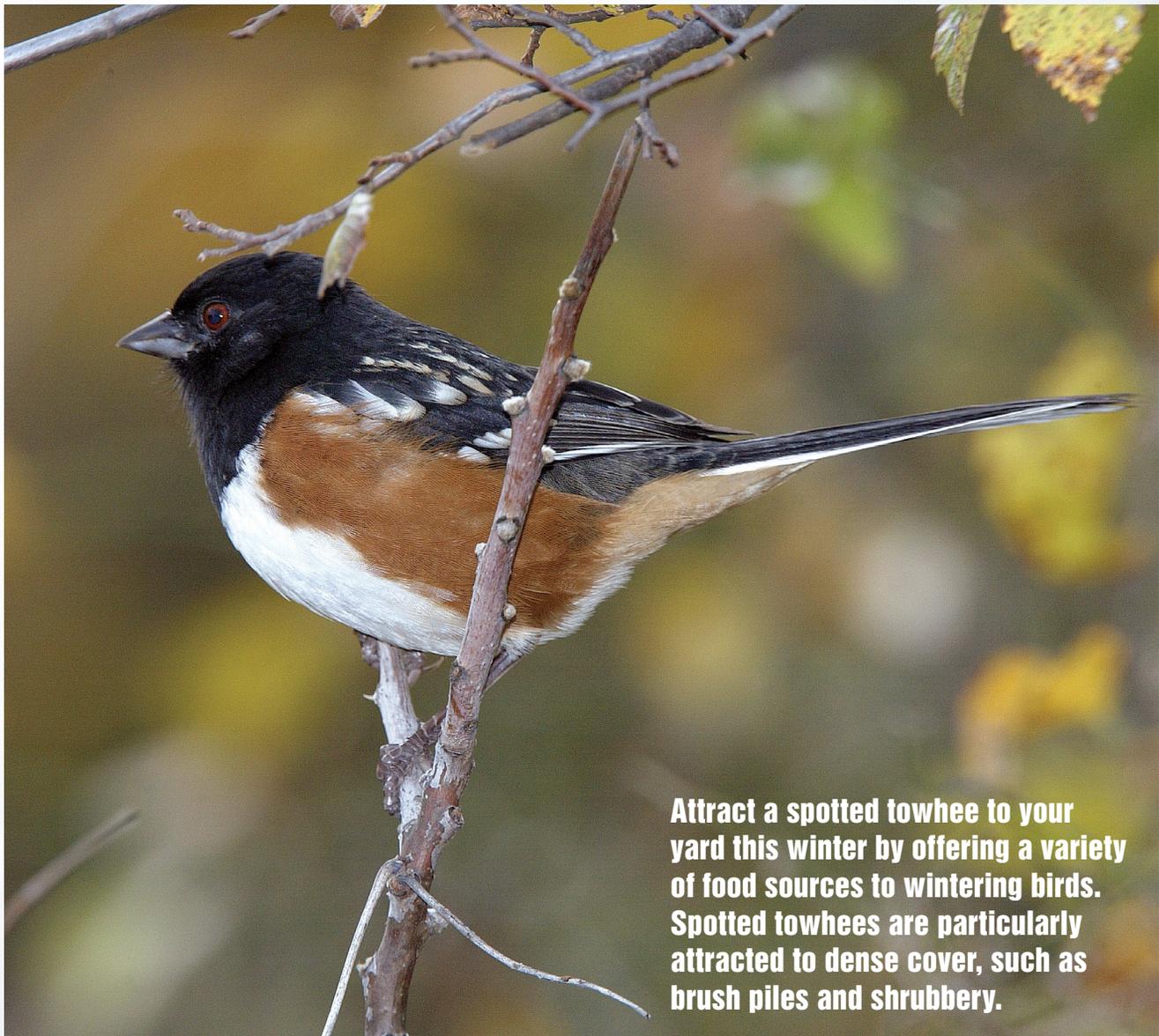
Other interesting species observed included the greater roadrunner, hermit thrush, northern mockingbird, American robin, cedar waxwing, brown thrasher, great blue heron, ring-billed gull and loggerhead shrike.

With more than 23,000 birds seen throughout the state and 59

different species seen, the 2010 Winter Bird Feeder Survey was definitely a success. 🌿

So Who Was in the Top Ten?

1. American Goldfinch – 3,118
2. Dark-eyed Junco – 2,455
3. Northern Cardinal – 1,965
4. Red-winged Blackbird – 1,709
5. House Sparrow – 1,466
6. Mourning Dove – 1,035
7. House Finch – 921
8. Blue Jay – 852
9. European Starling – 749
10. Carolina Chickadee – 708



Attract a spotted towhee to your yard this winter by offering a variety of food sources to wintering birds. Spotted towhees are particularly attracted to dense cover, such as brush piles and shrubbery.

Last Year's Top Five

Photos by Bill Horn

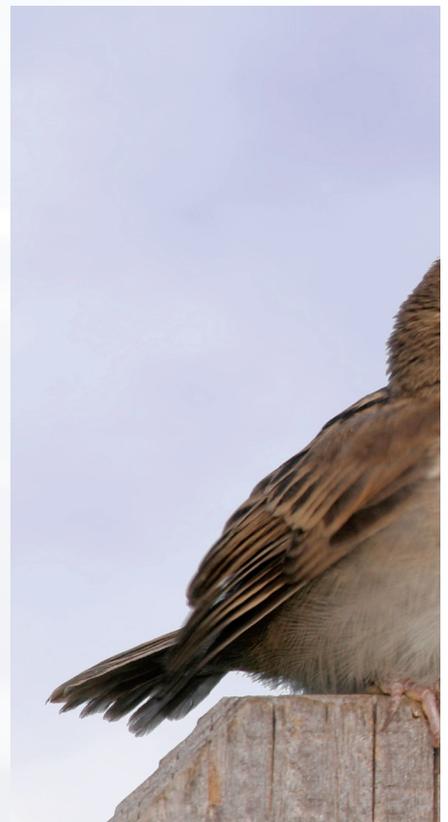
More than 50 bird species are commonly known to appear at birdfeeders in Oklahoma during the winter. But some are more common than others. The top five birds spotted last year included the American goldfinch, dark-eyed junco, Northern cardinal, red-winged blackbird and the house sparrow. Combined, almost 11,000 individual birds of these species were counted on survey forms. This year could yield all new results, but the Wildlife Department is depending on Oklahomans to participate in the survey Jan. 6-9 to ensure successful survey results. To learn more about other unique birds that can be spotted at Oklahoma backyard birdfeeders during the winter, log on to the Wildlife Department's Winter Bird Feeder Survey website at okwinterbirds.com.



**American goldfinch
(3,118 spotted; photo
shows summer
plumage)**



**Northern cardinal
(1,965 spotted)**



OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA



**Dark-eyed junco
(2,455 spotted)**



**Red-winged
blackbird (1,709
spotted; female
pictured)**



**House sparrow
(1,466 spotted)**

Other Birding Links

National Audubon Society:
audubon.org

Audubon Society of Central Oklahoma:
oklahomaaudubon.org

Oklahoma City Audubon Society:
okc-audubon.org

Tulsa Audubon Society:
tulsaaudubon.org

Oklahoma Ornithological Society:
okbirds.org

Birds of Oklahoma:
birdsofOklahoma.net

Sutton Avian Research Center:
suttoncenter.org

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory:
rmbo.org