

**PROJECT NATURE NEWSLETTER**

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**DECEMBER, 2018 ISSUE**



# Events



## **EPN Breakfast - Christmas Tree Sustainability**

*Nationwide and Ohio Farm Bureau 4-H Center  
2201 Fred Taylor Dr*

4th December 7:15 am - 9:30 am

A spirited exploration of the environmental trade-offs between real vs. artificial winter holiday decorations

Registration - Free for students (\$10 otherwise)

## **Unexpected Migrants**

*Blacklick Woods Metro Park - Nature Center*

8th December 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Learn about birds as well as other animals that migrate

## **Owls of Darby Creek**

*Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park - Indian Ridge*

8th December 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Try to lure in these raptors for a closer view on a 2-mile hike

## **Owl Hike**

*Highbanks Metro Park - Oak Coves Picnic Area*

8th December 6:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Hike 2 miles to search for both Great Horned Owl and Barred Owls

## **Weekly Bird Hike**

*Scioto Audubon Metro Park - Grange Insurance  
Audubon Center*

8th, 15th, 29th December 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Hike with experienced birders to find and learn about birds (Binoculars and field guides can be provided)

## **Common Winter Birds**

*Inniswood Gardens Metro Park - Garden Entrance*

8th December 10:00 am - 11:00 am

Learn about most common winter birds on a guided walk. Afterwards warm up inside the Innis House with warm drinks. Binoculars provided or bring your own

## **You can Eat That!**

*Blacklick Woods Metro Park - Nature Center*

9th December 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Take a short hike to discover what wild edible plants are available in the winter and try some samples

## **Night Life in The Stream**

*Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park - Nature Center*

15th December 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm

See what animals awaken after dark in the 53-foot living stream

## **Christmas Bird Count**

*Highbanks Metro Park - Nature Center*

15th December 9:00 am - 10:00 am

Search for winter birds as part of the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Enjoy hot chocolate while we tally our results

## **Christmas Bird Count**

*Sharon Woods Metro Park - Schrock Lake Restrooms*

15th December 10:00 am - 11:00 am

Search for birds on- and off-trail for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Tally your results over a cup of hot cocoa

## **Christmas Bird Count**

*Inniswood Gardens Metro Park - Innis House*

15th December 8:00 am - 11:00 am

Search for birds and help collect data for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Finish up inside with a warm drink

## **Memory Rock Hike**

*Clear Creek Metro Park - Park Office*

15th December 10:00 am - 1:30 pm

Join on a 4-mile backcountry hike to one of Clear Creek's best overlooks

# Events



## **Christmas Bird Count**

*Blendon Woods Metro Park - Nature Center*

16th December 7:00 am - 9:00 am

Help with one of the oldest citizen science projects

## **Christmas Bird Count**

*Scioto Audubon Metro Park - Grange Insurance*

*Audubon Center*

16th December 8:00 am - 2:00 pm

Join for the 119th Christmas Bird Count

To register, email Michael at [mgoldman@audubon.org](mailto:mgoldman@audubon.org)

## **Full Cold Moon Hike**

*Blendon Woods Metro Park - Nature Center*

22nd December 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm

Hike 2 miles by the light of the last full moon of the year

## **Full Moon Hike**

*Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park - Cedar Ridge*

*Ranger Station*

22nd December 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Take a brisk moon-lit 4-mile hike through fields and forests

## **Walk to the Eagle Nest**

*Three Creeks Metro Park - Confluence Area*

22nd December 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Learn about our national bird and take a 2-mile off-trail walk to visit their nesting site

## **Sunset Bison Walk**

*Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park - Nature Center*

23rd December 4:30 pm - 5:30 pm

Enjoy the sunset as we locate the bison in their winter pasture

## **Christmas Bird Count**

*Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park - Nature Center*

29th December 8:30 am - 9:30 am

Search for feathered friends as part of the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Tally results and enjoy hot chocolate

## **Look for Owls**

*Rocky Fork Metro Park - Millstone Shelter*

29th December 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Search for owls that spend the winter here

## **Last of the Year Birding**

*Three Creeks Metro Park - Confluence Area*

30th December 1:30 pm - 3:00 pm

Enjoy a relaxing walk to search for winter birds

## **46th Annual Winter Hike**

*Blacklick Woods Metro Park - Ash Grove Picnic Area*

5th January, 2019 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Take a 2-mile or 4-mile walk through the woods and meadows. Hot drinks and snacks provided, while supplies last

## **Audubon Conversation Club**

*Scioto Audubon Metro Park - Grange Insurance*

*Audubon Center*

5th January, 2019 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Sparking the "S" in STEM. Join for examining conservation issues impacting our communities and explore future careers

To register, email Allison at [aclark@audubon.org](mailto:aclark@audubon.org)

# Winter Birds

As winter sets in, some animals hibernate, some migrate to warmer temperatures, and some just hang in there! The same is the case with birds, except most birds don't hibernate in the strict sense of the word. Birds spending winter in colder regions may undergo *torpor* - a state of reduced metabolism - to conserve energy. Torpor is typically involuntary and lasts for short periods, while hibernation is voluntary and lasts for a much longer duration.

Here in Central Ohio, summer residents like the warblers, vireos, tanagers, flycatchers retreat back south to the tropics in the winter for warmer temperatures. But some hardy birds like the Northern Cardinal (our state bird), Eastern Bluebird, American Goldfinch, Carolina Chickadee, Blue Jay, woodpeckers, Tufted Titmouse, House Finch etc. stay year-round.

Additionally, we have some winter visitors from the boreal regions such as the Dark-eyed Junco, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrow, among others. Birds mostly feed on insects and in the winter, those are not in abundance and are difficult to find under the snow cover. Birds migrate to move from a region of scarce resources to areas with

a greater supply of food. However, some birds can withstand the cold and choose to stay as long as there's a sufficient supply of food available. These birds eat extra food in the fall to store enough fat that they can burn during cold winter months to keep themselves warm. They also fluff up their feathers for increased insulation and may undergo torpor to conserve energy. With their warm season diet of insects, worms and other invertebrates depleted in winter, they may also change their eating habits and start eating berries and seeds to supplement their diets.



Cooper's Hawk



Eastern Bluebird

If one were interested in getting started with birding, winter is the best time as there are far fewer species around this time than in spring or summer. Also, with all the deciduous trees having lost their foliage, the birds are more conspicuous against the naked trees, with the raptors being most easily observed because of their large size. Cooper's Hawk - year-round resident - is a common visitor at the feeders in search of a prey. Also, we have some migratory raptors visiting in the winter such as the Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Northern Harrier, and Rough-legged Hawk.

Birding is not only a great pastime in United States, it is also one of the most popular citizen science programs, where amateur birders submit their individual bird sightings to a centralized database. Birds are a 'barometer' of sorts of weather patterns and environmental conditions. The data consolidated from contributions made by regular citizens from all over the continent help scientists track patterns and note any deviations from the normal that subsequently inform conservation efforts. Two such citizen science programs aimed specifically at monitoring winter birds are **Project Feederwatch** and the **Christmas Bird Count**.

## Project Feederwatch

Project Feederwatch is a citizen science program managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The program runs from November through April every year, and anyone can participate and contribute. You can count birds as often as every week, or as infrequently as you like. All you need is a bird feeder, bird bath, or plantings that attract birds. Providing shelter and cover will also help to attract them. Learning to identify the common feeder birds is not very difficult and after just a few experiences, you can get good at it!

The information collected through the thousands of Feederwatch contributors can be used to measure changes in the winter ranges and abundances of bird species over time, providing both short-term and long-term trends - analogous to weather and climate! FeederWatch data tell us where birds are as well as where they are not. This crucial information enables scientists to piece together the most accurate population maps.



American Goldfinch

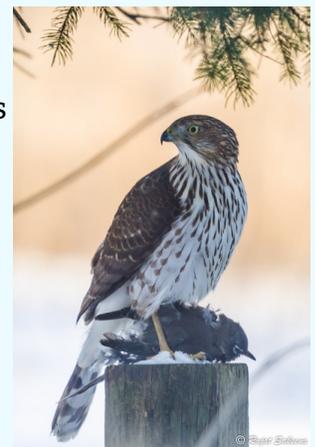


Red-bellied Woodpecker

FeederWatch data are important because they provide information about bird population biology that cannot be detected by any other available method. If the data reveal a long-term population decline of a particular species, scientists then evaluate what they know about the species, its habitat, and other factors that may be causing its decline. For example, is the species' food in short supply? Has the amount of suitable habitat changed on the species' breeding or wintering grounds? Has a potentially competitive species shown a population increase?

FeederWatch data from Florida showed that the winter population of the Painted Bunting declined steadily since the 1980s. This information, combined with complementary data from the Breeding Bird Survey (showing that breeding populations of Painted Buntings have declined at a rate of about 4 percent per year) led the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission to begin a systematic monitoring program of bunting populations so they could learn how to protect them.

A natural question arises. Does feeding birds hurt them in that they get dependent on us for food and could that harm their natural survival skills? Cornell Lab of Ornithology put together 30 years of Project Feederwatch data to check the hypothesis that if feeding the birds was harmful, then the species that use feeders the most should be doing worse than others. 98 species of feeder birds were studied. It was found that the species that use bird feeders were doing just as well, or better than, species that visited the feeders less so. The feeder species that showed declines seemed to be faced with non-feeder-related pressures, such as habitat loss. So, there was no result from the study that suggested that feeding birds caused any harm to their health or population. It is also said that birds are opportunists - if you put out food for them, they'll gladly take it, if not, they will go elsewhere and find it!



Cooper's Hawk with a fresh kill

If you have a house with a backyard, you could participate in Project Feederwatch at your home and at your own convenience. You could sign up for the program and get more information on the different kinds of feeders and bird food you would need at

<https://feederwatch.org/about/how-to-participate/>

If you don't have a house with a backyard, you could still participate and get involved through the Metro Parks. Highbanks hosts Project Feederwatch every year. You sit by a window, warm and cozy in the Nature Center and watch and record the birds that visit the feeders outside. Just sign up to become a Metro Parks volunteer and you could get involved and start contributing

<https://www.metroparks.net/programs-and-activities/volunteers/>

While it's good to put out a feeder for birds, it's not a recommended practice for other wild animals in general for several reasons, one of which is that they start associating humans with food and lose their natural fear of us. Even for birds, feeding the waterfowl such as ducks and geese is strongly discouraged. Feeding the waterfowl with items such as bread is extremely bad for their digestion and they are especially vulnerable to outbreaks of botulism (food poisoning) when artificially fed.

## Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is another citizen science program that monitors the winter birds. It is managed by the National Audubon Society and it is nation's longest running citizen science program. CBC has a rather interesting history.

Back in the day, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "side hunt". They would go out with their guns and whoever brought the largest pile of dead birds would win. By the turn of 20th century, the concept of conservation was gradually and steadily beginning to build up and many bird observers and scientists were becoming concerned about the declining bird populations. An ornithologist named Frank M. Chapman proposed a new holiday tradition - a Christmas Bird Census that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count on Christmas Day in 1900 with Chapman and 27 other dedicated birders doing 25 Christmas Bird Counts that day covering locations in Canada and United States.

CBC is officially conducted from December 14 through January 5 each year. Volunteers canvass a 15-mile diameter circle organized in different groups and count the birds they see and hear. There are several Christmas Bird Counts that are organized across the city on different dates. In addition to the public programs at Metro Parks for CBC listed on the Events page, information for other counts in Central Ohio region could be found on the Audubon website

<https://columbusaudubon.org/citizen-science/christmas-bird-count/>

Email the contact person for the count you wish to join so they could plan and arrange the groups accordingly. An experienced birder would lead the group.

Even if you think you can't identify birds, you would still be making a significant contribution by bringing with you an additional pair of eyes and ears to help locate birds that can then be identified by other experienced birders in the group. If you're new to birding, CBC is a great opportunity to get started.

The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. The long term perspective is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

*Birding is a fun activity and an extremely rewarding experience. By participating in citizen science programs like these and many others, your observations become part of something bigger and meaningful!*



Hairy Woodpecker

## Fun Facts

- The chicken is the closest living relative to the Tyrannosaurus Rex.
- The Bee Hummingbird is the smallest living bird in the world, with a length of just 5 cm (2 in).
- Crows have the largest cerebral hemispheres (brains), relative to body size, of any avian family.
- Cardinals (along with several other bird species) sometimes cover themselves in crushed or living ants, smearing them over their feathers, or allowing living ants to crawl on them. While scientists still aren't sure what the purpose of "anting" is, some believe the birds use the formic acid secreted during their ant bath to help get rid of lice and other parasites.

## Merlin Bird ID App

A very useful and **FREE** app from The Cornell Lab to learn identifying birds

<http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

