



2012 Great Backyard Bird Count Slide Show Script

- 1) Welcome to this presentation about the Great Backyard Bird Count! This year's count will be held February 17th through the 20th, 2012. It is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society with Canadian partner, Bird Studies Canada. We'll tell you why your help is needed, what scientists can learn from the count, and how to participate.
- 2) The Great Backyard Bird Count is a free, fun event held in February each year. This is the 15th year for the GBBC. Anyone of any age or skill level can participate by counting birds and entering their tallies online. When you take part in the count, you'll automatically be entered in drawings for bird feeders, binoculars, books, and many other items donated by sponsors.
- 3) It may be called the Great BACKYARD Bird Count--and your back yard is a great place to count. But you can count birds anywhere—at a nearby park, your schoolyard, a nature center, even the local landfill—anywhere there are birds!
- 4) You don't have to be a bird expert to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count. If you see a species you can't identify, consult a field guide or look at the ID tips on the Great Backyard Bird Count website. But if you're still not sure what the bird is, you do NOT have to report that species. Only report the ones you DO know.
- 5) All you do is count birds at your favorite location for at least 15 minutes on one or more days during the GBBC. Please note: you are NOT limited to that amount of time—count all day, over all four days if you wish! Enter your tallies on the GBBC website, BirdCount -dot- org. While you're there, explore a little. See your reports and what others are reporting from across the continent.
- 6) Your observations are important because no single scientist or team of scientists could hope to capture so much information about birds across the United States and Canada in only four days. During the GBBC, tens of thousands of people like you are counting birds. And the more who participate, the better the snapshot we will have of this winter's birds. Scientists—or anyone who's interested--can track the ups and downs of bird populations and learn more about their movements from year to year.
- 7) Last year GBBC participants reported 594 species on more than 92,000 lists—counting more than 11.4 million birds for the event. By taking part and submitting your checklists, you could put your town on the map as the top participating locality in your state or province.
- 8) Keep your digital camera handy too. You can upload photos of birds you've seen during the count via the GBBC website. We display hundreds of photos in the online photo gallery. They can't all be posted though, because thousands are submitted each year! But every photo is considered for the GBBC photo contest. Your photo may also be showcased in future print and web publications as well as media stories promoting the GBBC and other projects about birds.
- 9) Now, here's how you get your checklist together. First, it might be helpful to download a list of birds that could be seen in your area in February. You can get that from the GBBC website under the “What is the GBBC?” or “How to Participate” left-navigation buttons. Click on the link for a regional checklist, put in your zip or postal code, and print the list. Then use the list as you're watching to keep a tally of the highest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time.

10) For example, if you see ten Snow Geese while counting, then thirty, then a flock of thousands, you'll record the huge flock—estimating the number as best you can--the highest number you saw together at once. We ask you to do it this way to avoid counting the same birds over and over again.

11) Here's another important point: please enter a new checklist online for each day you participate in the count. It doesn't matter if you count at the same location each day—we need a new list for each day. Also submit a new checklist any time you count at a new location, so you could potentially submit more than one checklist on a given day if you count at more than one site.

12) When you're ready to report your results, go to the Great Backyard Bird Count website and click on the big "Submit your checklists" button at the top. You won't see this button until the count actually begins.

13) The first step is to enter the postal or zip code where you're doing your count, or you can also enter an actual town name and choose the state or province where it's located.

14) You'll be taken to an online form that asks you to fill out your email address—that's required so we can send you your reports and get in touch with you later if there's a question about your sightings. We also need to know what day you watched, what kind of habitat exists at the count site, and so on.

15) This is also where you'll check off whether or not you're reporting every species you saw. Check "I am NOT reporting every species I saw" if there were some birds you saw but could not identify.

16) When you get to the checklist for your area, you can arrange it in taxonomic order or in alphabetical order. In either case, fill in the boxes next to each bird species name with the highest number of that species you saw together at one time during your count. Many of the bird names are links to the Online Bird Guide if you want to double check your species identification.

17) If you enter a species or a number of birds that is unusual for your area in February, you'll see this "oops" message at the top of the page when you try to submit your list. Click the link or scroll down the page to the species report that's been flagged this way.

18) You'll see a message asking if you are sure about your report. You can click "yes" to confirm your entry and then submit your list. Your report will go to a GBBC data reviewer for your area. This is a normal part of the process and it's one of the ways to make sure we are getting accurate data. You may even be contacted by a reviewer to confirm the sighting which may then be approved for entry into the overall GBBC database. By the way, if you do see something unusual, it's VERY helpful if you can take a digital photo just in case confirmation of the sighting is needed.

19) Every sighting reported in the Great Backyard Bird Count becomes part of a permanent record that anyone with Internet access can explore. You can use the information to track year-to-year changes in the abundance and distribution of birds and learn about the complex patterns of winter bird movements. Look for trends that indicate how well birds are faring in the face of environmental changes such as urbanization, global climate change, and disease.

20) For example, GBBC participants have helped track the spread of Eurasian Collared-Doves over the past decade. Native to Europe, Eurasian Collared-Doves escaped captivity and first appeared in Florida in the 1980s. They have been expanding their range ever since. In the most recent count, participants reported Eurasian Collared-Doves in 40 states and provinces, and it was reported from Alaska for the first time during the 2011 GBBC.



21) During the 2011 Great Backyard Bird Count, the European Starling was the most numerous bird. The species is not native to North America. One hundred birds were introduced in New York's Central Park in 1890 and 1891. The descendants of these few birds now total more than 200 million and are distributed across the entire continent.

22) The Great Backyard Bird Count often coincides with the northward migration of Sandhill Cranes. This map from the most recent count shows a long streak of birds reported as they moved northward from Florida. Cranes wintering in Arizona and New Mexico take a different route to a staging area on the Platte River in Nebraska. This map is a great example of what we can learn from GBBC reports.

23) Although the Evening Grosbeak has been declining in overall numbers over the past 20 years, GBBC participants reported a surprising increase in the number of grosbeaks during the 2011 count. The total number of observations for this species was the highest it has ever been during the GBBC, an increase that isn't simply attributable to greater GBBC participation. Future counts may reveal whether this increase is indicative of a long-term trend.

24) North American Crows were hit hard when the West Nile virus arrived in 1999. From 2003 onward, the American Crow never placed higher than ninth or tenth on our most numerous species list. But in the 2011 GBBC crows jumped to number seven among the most numerous species. Monitoring the crow count in the years ahead will tell us whether this is a one-year fluctuation or evidence of a true recovery for this species from the devastation of West Nile virus.

25) Results of the Great Backyard Bird Count are useful not only to scientists, but to anyone who is curious about birds. Everyone can access the same results, going all the way back to the first count in 1998. You can select lists or maps showing results for any bird species, town, state or province. You can look up results from any year or watch animated maps showing how the distribution of birds changes from year to year.

26) Everything you need to know is on the Great Backyard Bird Count website, including help with the more difficult bird identifications—click on the “Learn About Birds” tab on the left side of the GBBC home page. Is that a House Finch or a Purple Finch? A Downy Woodpecker or a Hairy Woodpecker? You can also check out the online bird guide--it has images, sounds, and range maps for more than 500 species.

27) In the weeks leading up to the Great Backyard Bird Count—spread the word to your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, and your local media outlets...we have suggestions on how to do that on the website—just click the “Get Involved” button for ideas and guidance. And please join in the conversation on the GBBC Facebook group page, share your photos and ID questions or “Tweet” all you like about getting ready for the count

28) If you still have questions about how to participate in the GBBC, here are email contacts for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada. You may want to check out the website's FAQ section first, though, to see if your question has already been answered.

29) So, brush up on your winter birds and save the dates—we want you to be a part of this year's Great Backyard Bird Count, February 17th through the 20th, 2012. Now, here's a rundown on the top 10 birds reported on the most checklists in the 2011 Great Backyard Bird Count and some interesting facts about them.



30) #1: Northern Cardinal. The brilliant red plumage of a male Northern Cardinal is the result of pigments found in the cardinal's natural foods, which include seeds, fruits, and insects. One study found that brighter males have better nesting territories and raise more young than duller males. The Northern Cardinal is a year-round resident, but the species' range has been expanding northward since the early 1800s, possibly as a result of moderate temperatures and a greater availability of feeders.

31) #2: Mourning Dove. Mourning Doves are adaptable birds. They will nest in open woodlands and edges between forest and prairie, as well as in yards and on window ledges. Ever since European settlement of North America began, Mourning Dove numbers have increased. Of all the birds that are found only in North America, the Mourning Dove is one of the most abundant and widespread.

32) #3: Dark-eyed Junco. The Dark-eyed Junco is one of the most familiar and widespread North American songbirds. Although it is one species, there are distinctly different forms. The "slate-colored" variety, shown here, is primarily found in eastern North America. The "Oregon" junco is found primarily in the west and has a very distinct dark hood. There are several other forms aside from these two, but all are categorized as Dark-eyed Juncos.

33) #4: Downy Woodpecker. Similar in appearance to the Hairy Woodpecker, the Downy Woodpecker is smaller and has a shorter bill. Downy Woodpeckers mainly eat insects. They also readily visit feeders.

34) #5: American Goldfinch. Male American Goldfinches are brilliant yellow in summer, but they take on the more muted colors of the females in winter. In winter, American Goldfinches are sometimes seen in flocks of more than 200. Although some individuals stay put year round, others migrate long distances. One goldfinch banded in Ontario, Canada, was found eight months later in Louisiana, more than 1,000 miles away.

35) #6: Blue Jay. Blue Jays are intelligent birds, known for their loud, harsh calls. In winter, jays eat mostly acorns and nuts. When scientists followed some jays using transmitters, they found that the birds were storing 3,000 to 5,000 seeds in a single autumn. At feeders, they sometimes fill up their throat pouch with seeds or suet and fly off to store the food.

36) #7: American Crow. American Crows are more susceptible to West Nile virus than most other birds. West Nile virus first appeared in North America in 1999. Before 2003, American Crows always ranked as the top 4th or 5th most frequently reported species during the Great Backyard Bird Count. Every year since 2003, their ranking has been 9th or 10th. But in 2011 greater numbers were reported, pushing the crow to # 7 on the top ten most frequently reported birds in the GBBC.

37) #8: Black-capped Chickadee. This is one of the most familiar and beloved birds in northern North America, and a frequent visitor to bird feeders. Chickadees hide seeds and other food items. Each item is placed in a different spot and the clever chickadee can remember thousands of these hiding places.

38) #9: House Finch. True to their name, these finches are often found around houses. This species was absent east of the Rockies 70 years ago. In the 1940s, House Finches were introduced to Long Island, New York. Since then, they have spread across the East.

39) #10: Tufted Titmouse. The geographic range of the Tufted Titmouse has expanded in the past 50 years, probably because of warming temperatures and increased availability of feeders. Young titmice sometimes stay with their parents throughout the winter, and may even stay on to help care for their new siblings in spring.



40) All the great photos you've seen in this presentation were taken by people who participated in the 2011 Great Backyard Bird Count. The artwork showing the House Finch, Purple Finch, Downy Woodpecker, and Hairy Woodpecker comes from Larry McQueen. Thanks for watching—enjoy the birds! And we'll see you for the next Great Backyard Bird Count...

