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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Get Ready For The Great Backyard Bird Count!

Submitted by Paul Lehman



The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) returns for its ninth season February 17-20, 2006. The National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology encourage everyone to COUNT BIRDS WITH A BUDDY! Bird enthusiasts of all ages can share their love of birds with a friend, a child, a scout troop, a class, or a co-worker-opening new eyes to the joy of birding and the fun of creating a unique snapshot of winter bird abundance and distribution across the continent. Every pair of eyes is needed and everybirdy counts, whether in a backyard, on a high-rise balcony, in a park, or on any of the 730 million acres of public lands.

In 2005, participants sent in more than 52,000 checklists, with a record-breaking 613 species and more than 6 million birds counted. These millions of sightings generate what would be impossible otherwise-continent-wide information about where the birds are and how their numbers compare with those of previous years. Anyone with Internet access can see the results in maps and charts as the sightings pour in.

"The level of energy created each February by Great Backyard Bird counters is phenomenal," said Dr. Paul Green, director of Citizen Science for Audubon. "What always amazes me are the new discoveries made by people across North America. Some bird watchers even send digital photos to back up their reports. Last year participants sent in more than 1,000 photos and many are now part of the GBBC web site gallery."

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Cornell Cooperative Extension in Niagara County provides equal program and employment opportunities.

For nearly a decade, the GBBC has kept tabs on the ever-changing patterns of birds in winter. How far north will American Robins be reported this year? Will Sandhill Cranes migrate early or late? Introduced Eurasian Collared-Doves have been turning up in new states--where will they be this year? Native Red-bellied Woodpeckers have mercury accumulation in Rusty Blackbirds, and removal of Painted Buntings for the illegal cage bird industry, may make a bad situation worse.

In 2006, for the first time, the Lab of Ornithology and Audubon are launching an element of friendly competition. Awards will be given to localities that submit the most checklists, record the greatest number of species, or count the highest number of birds. (Last year's top numbers: 433 checklists from Gautier, Mississippi, 169 species from Corpus Christi, Texas, and 291,246 birds from Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri.) A photo contest will also be held based on bird pictures taken during the event and submitted for posting on the GBBC gallery. Winners will be announced after all the data from the event have been submitted.

Everyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to seasoned experts. During the count, bird watchers tally up birds for as little as 15 minutes, or for as long as they like, keeping track of the highest number of each bird species they see together at one time. People are encouraged to report birds from public lands and local parks, as well as from their backyards. Participants enter their numbers online at www.birdsource.org/gbbc and can explore sightings maps, lists, and charts as the count progresses.

Year-round, anyone can view results from past counts and learn how to participate by visiting www.birdsource.org/gbbc. There is no fee or registration for the event, which is sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited. For more information, contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at cornellbirds@cornell.edu or (800) 843-2473 if in the United States; (607) 254-2473 if calling internationally; or contact Audubon at

citizenscience@audubon.org; (215) 355-9588, Ext. 16.

Ambassadors Needed!

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon are looking for ambassadors for the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 17-20, 2006.

Ambassadors play a key role in helping us spread word about the event. Choose your level of involvement--whether by putting up posters, sending email messages to local list serves, forwarding a press release to your newspaper, hosting GBBC workshops, or encouraging libraries and nature centers to make computer available for participants to enter data.

For more information, visit www.birdsource.org/gbbc or sign up to receive an ambassador packet by mail. Write to Jennifer Smith at jls39@cornell.edu. Type GBBC in the subject line. Include your name, address, phone number and email address in the message.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a nonprofit membership institution interpreting and conserving the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.

Audubon is celebrating its centennial year of protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Its national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in positive conservation experiences.

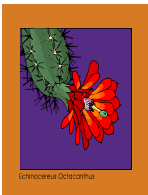
A Timely Reminder

Submitted by John Farfaglia

Beware of holiday plants that may be harboring unwelcome guest that will infest your houseplants. Before purchasing holiday plants, examine them for signs of insect infestation. Look under leaves, on

stems, and in the crevices of the plant. Cottony deposits indicate the presence of mealybugs; mottled leaves may mean spider mites. And sticky deposits on leaves are a sure sign of aphids. If you notice these problems, do not buy the plant.

As an extra precaution, move your treasured houseplants to a different room than those plants that will only be displayed for a few weeks. Many houseplant headaches can be avoided this way. Source: GroNews, November/December 2003



Culture Of Holiday Cactus

Submitted by John Farfaglia

Members of the family *Cactaceae*, Christmas Cactus and Thanksgiving Cactus share the same growing requirements. These naturally epiphytic (growing with aerial roots) cacti are named after the holidays occurring during their blooming periods. Once found blooming only in red, they can now also be found in white, purple, orange and pink.

Botanically, Christmas Cactus is *Schlumbergera bridgesii*, while Thanksgiving cactus is *Schlumbergera truncata* (sometimes listed as *Zygocactus truncatus*). The Thanksgiving Cactus is known by several other common names, including Crab Cactus, Claw Cactus, or *Zygocactus*. To distinguish between these two cacti, look at the stem segments: Christmas Cactus has rounded segment tips, while Thanksgiving Cactus has pointed tips.

Culture: Summer is generally a resting period for these cacti, so keep the soil barely moist and withhold fertilizer during this time.

These are short-day plants; in other words, they need short days to form flower buds. When new growth appears following the resting period, keep at 55-65 degrees F, with 10 hours of light per day and 14 hours of darkness, or 4-6 weeks. When the flower buds appear begin regular culture: 65-75 degrees F. day temperatures, and 55-65

degrees F. at night. They prefer an Eastern exposure, bright light without direct sun, and high humidity (45-60%). Keep evenly moist, using a standard, well-drained soilless mix, and feed lightly every two weeks with a high-phosphorus fertilizer. They prefer to be pot-bound. The plants should bloom within 6 weeks.

Problem: Mushy stems, accompanied by wet soil: root rot, a result of overwatering. Shriveled stems, accompanied by dry soil: not enough water. Buds form but then drop off; this is caused by adverse growing conditions, including drafts, temperature changes, overwatering, underwatering, or low humidity. Credit: Dave Reville, Extension Educator, Orleans County Cornell Cooperative Extension

Check Seed Catalogs For Mention Of Disease Resistance

Submitted by John Farfaglia



Enjoy the pretty pictures, but read the variety descriptions closely. Pay particular attention to any mention of disease resistance.

Most gardeners tend to worry more about insects and weeds than about plant diseases even though diseases can significantly reduce yields and quality. Gardeners can minimize the impact of plant disease problems by selecting disease-resistant varieties and rotating crops each year to prevent the buildup of disease-causing organisms in the soil.

Even if you use disease-resistant varieties as much as possible, it is still a good idea to rotate your crops so that closely related crops do not follow one another in the same spot. Growing plants in the same family – peppers, tomatoes, eggplant and potatoes, for instance, in the same part of the garden year after year promotes the buildup of diseases and pests that affect these plants. Following tomatoes with cole crops and then squash and then beans, for instance, means that any disease organisms or insects that overwinter will not find their

favorite host waiting for them in the spring. Crop rotation breaks the cycle of infestation, buildup, overwintering and reinfestation the next year.

The three families of crops for which rotation is most important are the nightshade crops tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and potatoes; the cole crops – cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, Chinese cabbage, collards and kale; and the cucurbits – melons, cucumbers, squash (summer and winter), gourds and pumpkins.

Another crop that will benefit from rotation is corn. The organisms that cause corn smut, as well as the corn rootworm, can build up in the soil when corn follows corn and cause more trouble each year.

Rotating other garden crops—peas, beans, radishes, onions, carrots, greens, etc., is less critical. These crops are less prone to soil-borne diseases than crops in the three families listed above. *Credit: Dave Reville, Extension Educator, Orleans County Cornell Cooperative Extension*

Who Is Eating In Your Pantry?

Submitted by John Farfaglia

Be alert for flying moths primarily in the kitchen or food storage area, including pet food and birdseed. These insects, known as the Indian Meal Moth, feed on grain products. The adult beetles and moths are frequently seen in cabinets, on counters and around windows. The larvae and some adults of these insects feed on grains (rice, barley, corn, wheat, birdseed), grain products (oatmeal, cornmeal, pasta, cereals, flour, cake mixes, pancake flour, granola, dry pet food), nuts, dried fruits, and other dried plant material (dried flower arrangements, ornamental corn, seed displays). All life stages can be found in these products, often simultaneously. Generally, these pests are brought into the house in infested food packages. When infestations are discovered, remove and inspect opened and unopened food packages from the cabinets. Discard

infested packages. Vacuum shelves and cracks around shelves to remove spilled food and insects and dispose of the vacuumed material. Wash shelves with soapy water. Place food products in airtight containers. If no insects are found after 6-12 months, they have probably been eliminated from the house. Source: Dave Reville, Orleans County Extension Educator

Seafood Watch

Submitted by Paul Lehman



Enjoy that famous Western New York institution, the fish fry? Most people do and probably give little thought to whether that piece of haddock on the plate has been caught from overfished, exploited fisheries of the oceans.

We don't have to look far to find articles in the news about the dangers of overfishing and use of fishing methods that are very destructive to the world's fisheries. Is your attitude "eat, drink and enjoy" or someone else will do it for you? Do you believe that individual actions, when done in a polite way can have an impact on the marketplace?

I must admit that before a visit to one of the world's leading aquariums, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, I took for granted that government regulation and the abundance of haddock allowed me to manage my diet with the typical fish fry, or, in my case, broiled fish.

If you are a computer internet user, visit www.seafoodwatch.org and "fish" around for the regional guide for the northeast. The guide is printed here for you but taking a printable version off line provides a handy pocket guide you can take to a restaurant in your wallet. Haddock (hook and line-caught) is not the perfect choice but it is a good alternative. Haddock (trawl-caught) should be avoided.

