

# Great Backyard Bird Count Sets New Species Record

*Nearly half the world's species identified in four days*

Participants from more than 100 countries submitted a record 147,265 bird checklists for the annual [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) and broke the previous count record for the number of species identified. The 5,090 species reported represents nearly half the possible bird species in the world. The four-day count was held February 13-16, the 18th year for the event which is a joint project of the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and the [National Audubon Society](#) with partner [Bird Studies Canada](#). The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track the health of bird populations at a scale made possible by using the [eBird](#) online checklist program.

A sampling of species found by intrepid counters include [Ibisbill](#) in India, [Bornean Bistlehead](#) in Malaysia, and [Magellanic Plover](#) in Chile, complete with amazing photos. GBBC participants even reported two birds, [Millpo Tapaculo](#) and [Santa Marta Screech-Owl](#) that have not yet been described in the scientific literature as new species.

## Bitter Weather

The bitter cold, snowy weather in much of the northeastern United States and in Canada was a major factor in this year's count. Across the Northeast, Sunday was particularly frigid and windy, and the number of reports showed an obvious dip as some counters were forced indoors. As one participant in Québec noted, watching birds came with a price as wind chill temperatures rarely topped -20 degrees Celsius (zero degrees Fahrenheit).

For those who did brave the cold, the GBBC data will help scientists better understand the impact of the cold on bird populations. For example, scientists will be able to compare the abundance of some so-called "half-hardy" species, such as Carolina Wren and Yellow-rumped Warbler, to see if this cold winter has affected their populations.

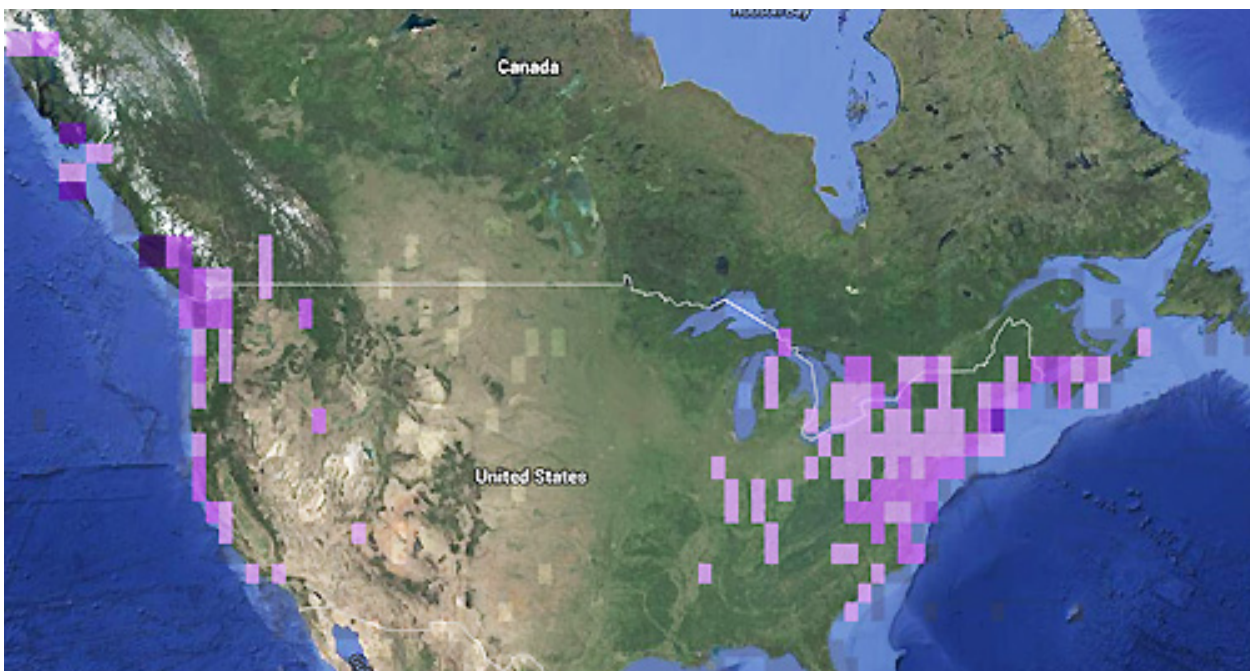
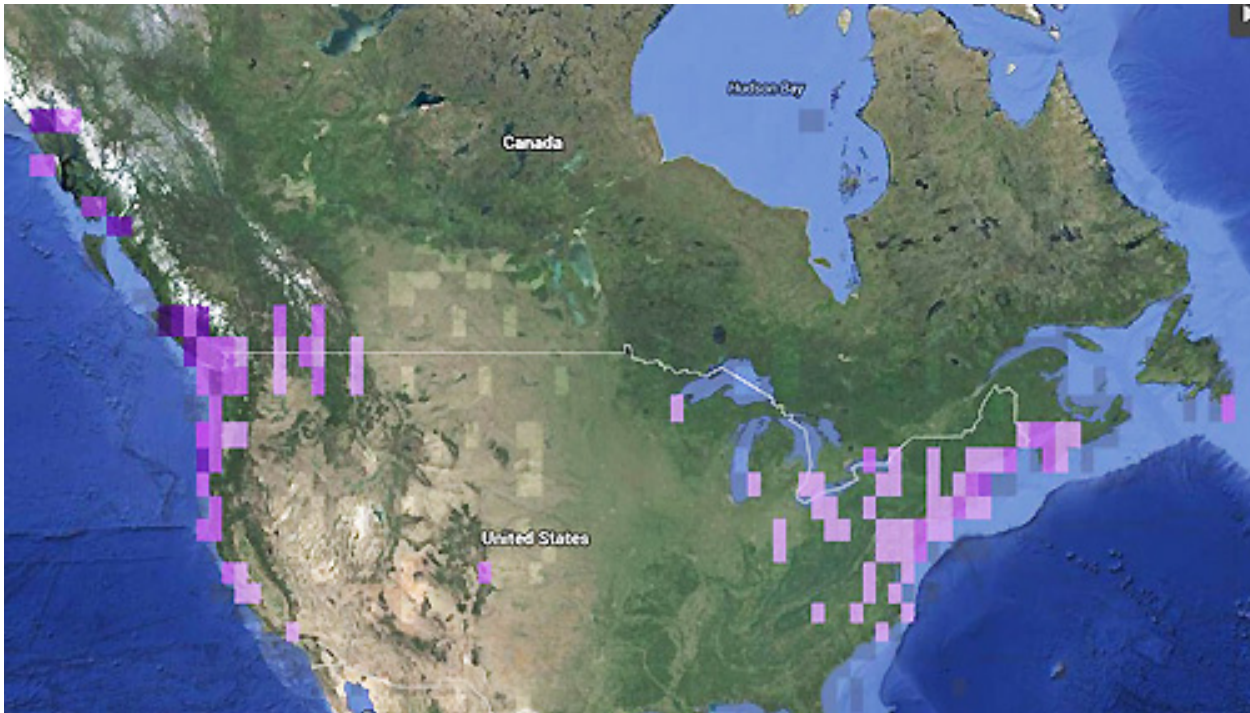
Last year's cold drove many waterfowl inland (particularly White-winged Scoters and Red-necked Grebes) in the United States, but that has not been happening much this year. Comparing the ice cover in different regions of Canada and the northern United States between last winter and



*Northern Flicker by Linda Izer, Arkansas, 2015 GBBC.*

this will give insight on the origins of these species and the potential impact to populations with last year's freeze-out.

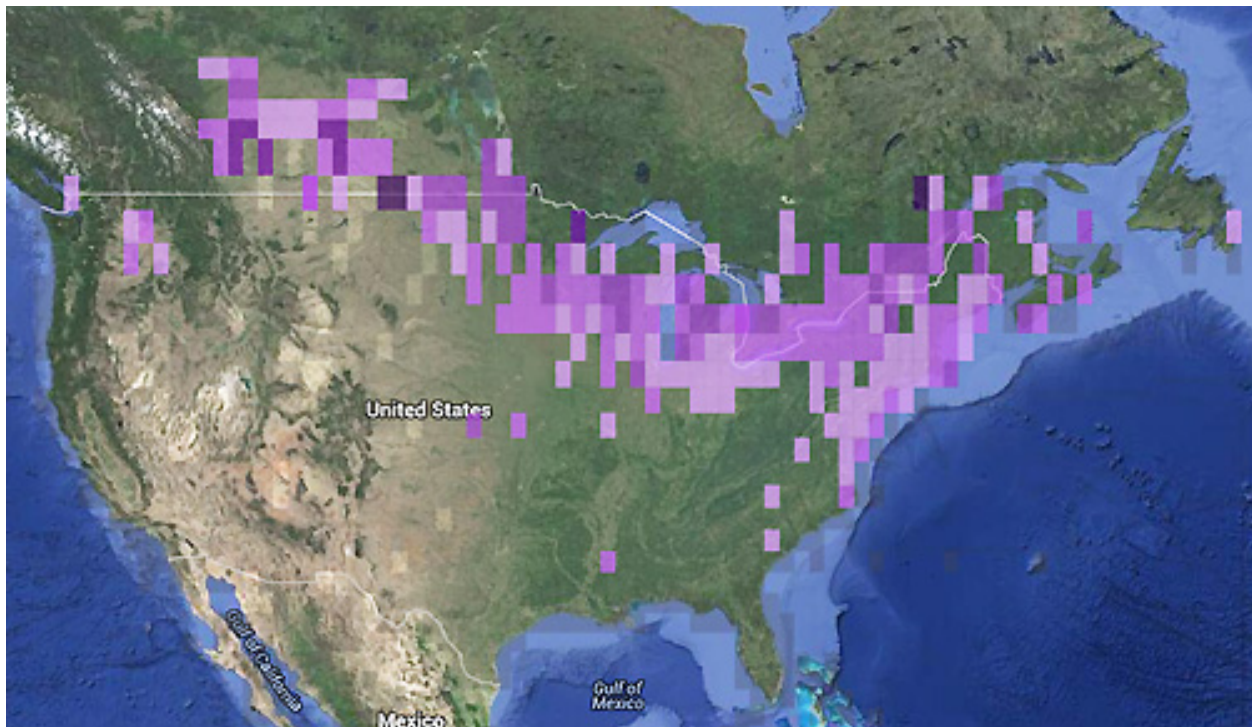
**Compare the distribution of the Red-necked Grebe in February 2014 (top map) with the distribution this year (bottom map).**

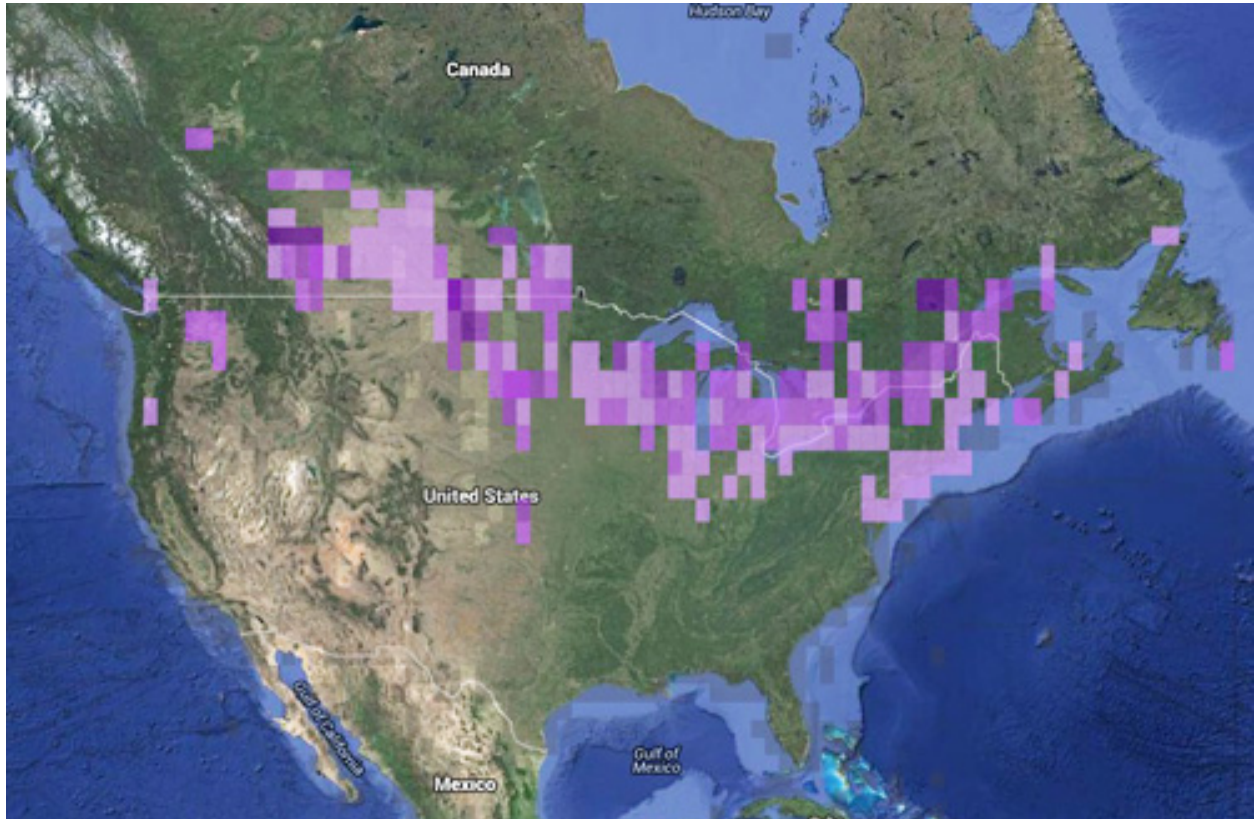


## Snowy Owl Echo

Snowy Owls are one of the most charismatic and emblematic birds of winter. They breed in Arctic regions worldwide and drop south in some winters ("irrupt"), depending on food supplies and their breeding success in the previous summer. The winter of 2013-14 was a huge year for these owls which appeared in amazing numbers across the Great Lakes states, Northeastern U.S., Atlantic Coast, and southern Canada. GBBC reports for 2015 also show a surge in Snowy Owl sightings across the same range, though the frequency of reports is about half of last winter's. This is a well-known phenomenon with Snowy Owls, with the year after a very large invasion often being referred to as an "echo flight."

**Comparing the Snowy Owl reports in February for 2014 (top) and 2015 (bottom) shows that the extent of reports this year is very similar to last year, even if the total frequency of reports is about half of last year.**

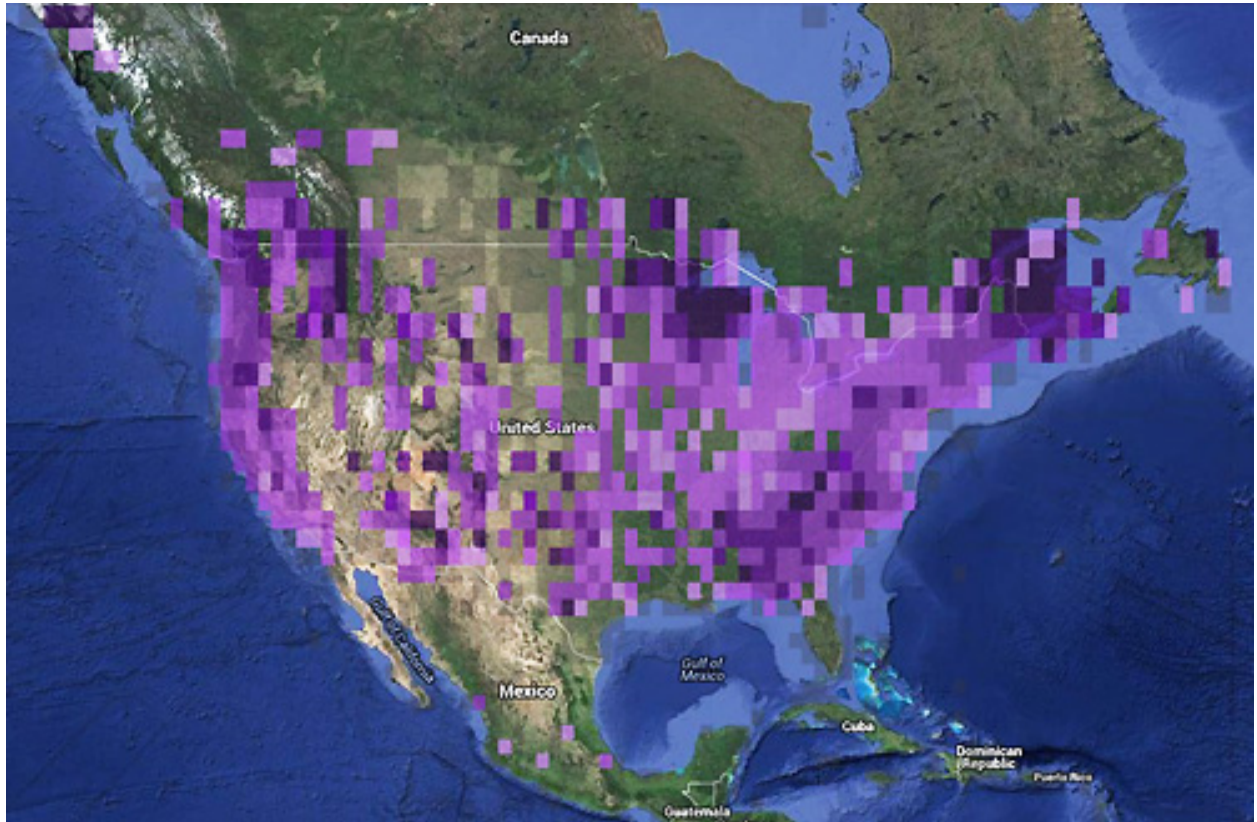




## Winter Finches

Winter finches—such as Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, redpolls, and crossbills—are popular among GBBC participants. These birds also "irrupt" south of their usual haunts depending on food supplies, so their numbers in a given region may change widely from year to year.

2015 was a banner year for Pine Siskins which were reported on 10.5% of GBBC checklists (see map below). Compare that to 1.2% of checklists in 2014 when most siskins stayed far north in Canada. Siskins will likely be hanging around through April and May, especially if the feeders are stocked with their favorite nyjer (thistle) seed.



*Indian Golden Oriole by Sumit Sen, West Bengal, India, 2015 GBBC.*

## GBBC Top 10 Lists

Surprisingly, a Eurasian species, the Brambling, appears on the Top 10 list of most reported species for the first time ever. Since November, some of these birds have been spotted on the West Coast and others strayed even farther by turning up in Montana, Wyoming, and Ontario, with one 2015 GBBC record in North America from Washington state. But the Brambling's appearance among the Top 10 can be traced to [one checklist from Germany](#) reporting a flock estimated at one million birds. Up to three million Bramblings have been known to gather at that site.

In North America, California sits atop the leader board with the most checklists submitted and the greatest number of species, followed by Pennsylvania and New York. Ontario, Canada, is in the Top 10 for the second year in a row, nudging past Ohio and Georgia. Ontario sent in the highest number of checklists in Canada (4,218) but British Columbia reported the highest number of species (197).

Checklists from Québec this year are up, largely because [Regroupement QuébecOiseaux](#) joined the eBird family this year with a regional version of eBird in the province. In many ways, the province-wide bird checklist program in Québec that began in the 1990s provided much of the inspiration for the GBBC and eBird, so we are pleased to have this partnership and look forward to growing GBBC stats in the years to come. Québec residents have submitted 1,520 checklists this year, a 33% increase over 2014.

Outside of the U.S. and Canada, India was once again a star performer, nearly doubling the number of checklists submitted to more than 6,800 and reporting the greatest number of species with 717.

An example of the impact one dedicated individual can have is that of Zheljko Stanimirovic who promoted the GBBC on Facebook and local listservs in Serbia. [The 109 checklists and 82 species found in Serbia](#) were a really impressive result, ranking 16th highest among the more than 100 countries that participated this year. We look forward to more growth in Serbia as each GBBC participant from this year tells their friends to join and we encourage others to follow Zheljko's model to promote the GBBC in their community.

## Top 10 most frequently reported species

(number of checklists reporting this species):

Species	Number of Checklists
Northern Cardinal	59,083
Dark-eyed Junco	59,074
Mourning Dove	48,313
Downy Woodpecker	45,399
Blue Jay	41,671
American Goldfinch	39,880
House Finch	39,241
Tufted Titmouse	38,191
Black-capped Chickadee	36,363
House Sparrow	34,564

\* All Top 10 species are North American, reflecting high participation from this region.

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## Top 10 most numerous species

(sum of how many individuals were observed across all checklists):

Species	Number of Individuals
Snow Goose	1,494,937
Canada Goose	1,110,946
Brambling	1,000,047
European Starling	630,610
Mallard	579,330
American Coot	501,152
American Robin	488,063
Dark-eyed Junco	465,939
Red-winged Blackbird	432,513
American Goldfinch	364,963

\* Most of these Top 10 species are North American, reflecting high participation from this region.

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### Top 10 states/provinces by checklists submitted

State/Province	Number of Species	Number of Checklists
California	376	8,453
Pennsylvania	141	7,120
New York	163	6,615
Florida	309	5,478
Texas	366	5,256
Virginia	180	4,672
North Carolina	201	4,497
Ontario	137	4,216
Ohio	125	4,190
Georgia	200	4,017

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### Top 10 countries by checklists submitted

Country	Number of Species	Number of Checklists
United States	671	108,396
Canada	241	10,491
India	717	6,810
Australia	524	812
Mexico	653	425
Costa Rica	559	303
Portugal	197	193
New Zealand	126	161
Ecuador	784	138
Honduras	353	133

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Explore what's been reported on the [Great Backyard Bird Count website](#). See what species are being reported and how many checklists are being turned in at the county, state/province, and country levels. Check out a sampling of the photos submitted for [the GBBC photo contest](#).

**And thank you to the estimated more than 143,000 bird watchers around the world who participated in the GBBC this year. Join us again next year when the count will be February 12-15, 2016!**