



*Downy Woodpecker by Shelia Rudesill, North Carolina, 2017 GBBC*

## 2017 GBBC Summary

March 3, 2017

By Marshall Iliff and Pat Leonard

Another Great Backyard Bird Count is in the books, and thanks to participants from around the world, it was the biggest count in its 20-year history. Bird watchers set a new high bar for number of checklists submitted and total number of species reported. Whether longtime contributors or first-timers, many expressed their enjoyment of the experience.

Schoolchildren in Memphis, Tennessee, clearly had fun with their count. Their teacher wrote to say:

***"Our school 'Backyard Bird Watch' event was wonderful. As a second grader told the adult leader of her group, 'This is the best day of my life! I got to see a Downy Woodpecker.' "***

We hope many of you experienced a similar thrill during the count!

Let's look at some of the numbers as of the afternoon of March 3, 2017--they're pretty impressive!

**Estimated Participants: 214,018** (2016 final total estimate: 163,763)

**Species: 5,940** (2016 final total: 5,689)

**Complete Checklists: 173,826** (2016 final total: 162,052)

Note that some of the numbers may still change slightly as the final checklists for the GBBC dates are added through eBird or flagged reports are validated by our reviewers. Our Top 10 lists tell a few stories, too.

### Top 10 most frequently reported species:

(number of GBBC checklists reporting this species)

What's interesting to note in this list is that the American Crow has bounced all the way up to the number two spot. It has typically come in near the bottom of the Top 10 ever since West Nile Virus appeared in North America in 1999. Perhaps the crows are finally rebounding after the virus took a serious toll on their overall population.

Species	Number of Checklists
Northern Cardinal	52,422
American Crow	47,275
Mourning Dove	47,076
Dark-eyed Junco	42,208
Downy Woodpecker	38,760
Blue Jay	38,402
Black-capped Chickadee	36,417
House Finch	35,889
House Sparrow	33,749
White-breasted Nuthatch	32,598

Data totals as of March 3, 2017

Note: All Top 10 species are common in North America, reflecting continued high participation from this region.

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### Top 10 most numerous species:

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

Species	Number of Individuals
Snow Goose	4,793,261
Red-winged Blackbird	2,464,572
Canada Goose	1,895,077
European Starling	919,038
Mallard	715,594
Ring-billed Gull	647,950
American Coot	500,261

Greater White-fronted Goose	426,040
Common Grackle	416,720
American Crow	378,483

Data totals as of March 2, 2017

Note: These Top 10 species are common in North America, reflecting high participation from this region.

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## Top 10 states by checklists submitted

\* New state checklist record

California, New York, and Pennsylvania were all vying for the top spot, but with all the horrible weather on the West Coast during the count, overall checklists from California are down considerably this year. New York just edged by Pennsylvania to take the top spot.

State	Number of Species	Number of Checklists
New York	181	7,191
Pennsylvania	147	6,983
California	370	6,891
Florida	309	6,024
Texas	360	5,696
Virginia	196	5,190
Ohio	139	4,584
Washington	215	4,252
North Carolina	213	4,220
Michigan	140	4,197

Data totals as of March 3, 2017

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## Top 10 Canadian Provinces by checklists submitted

\* New provincial checklist record

New records were set in four provinces!

Province	Number of Species	Number of Checklists
Ontario	158	7,158*
British Columbia	206	2,227
Quebec	120	2,215*
Alberta	91	869
Nova Scotia	135	748*
Manitoba	63	566
Saskatchewan	68	405 (equals record)
New Brunswick	94	303
Newfoundland & Labrador	75	184
Prince Edward Island	63	145*

Data totals as of March 3, 2017

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## Top 10 countries by checklists submitted

\* New country checklist record

The list is similar to that of 2016, but the checklist totals are higher, setting new records in 7 of the top 10 countries.

Country	Number of Species	Number of Checklists
United States	671	113,117
Canada	258	14,908*
India	801	11,008*
Australia	552	1,675
Mexico	774	1,190
Spain	291	696*
Costa Rica	648	645*

Portugal	220	480*
Taiwan	267	451*
United Kingdom	190	396*

Data totals as of March 3, 2017

## Rarities



*Pink-footed Goose in Newfoundland by Water Molly via Birdshare.*

Very rare species are always GBBC highlights. a couple of noteworthy species reported this year include the two owls shown here, the Blakiston's Fish-Owl in Japan, and a Jungle Owlet in India.

A continuing trend is the increase in Greenland-breeding geese reaching North American shores. Almost unknown on the continent 20 years ago, the aptly-named Pink-footed Geese have increased dramatically, with birds being seen during this year's GBBC in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Nova Scotia. Even more surprising, two birds in British Columbia could represent real explorers or possible escapees from a waterfowl collection. This species typically spends the winter in northwestern Europe, including Ireland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and western Denmark.

A rare bird causing a stir in the United States--and another first for the GBBC--has been the [Black-backed Oriole in Berks County, Pennsylvania](#). Debate continues as to whether this adult male escaped from captivity from the surprisingly prevalent illegal bird trade or flew there under its own power from its central Mexico home range. If it is a wild bird, it would be the first-ever report of this species in the United States. We may never know the answer for sure, but birders have been enjoying its presence in Pennsylvania. Check out the [local news story](#) about it with some great photos.

Another never-before-seen in the United States during the GBBC is a Kirtland's Warbler reported on Key Biscayne, just outside of Miami. One of the rarest warblers in the world, Kirtland's Warbler breeds almost exclusively in Michigan and winters almost exclusively in the Bahamas. This bird may have moved to Florida instead due to hurricane damage in the Bahamas (or could just be an explorer!). Brandon Trentler was lucky enough to capture the photo below!



Kirtland's Warbler by [Brandon Trentler](#), Florida/[Macaulay Library](#).

## **Weather Impact**

The weather has been unkind to southern California, slammed with high winds, lots of rain, flooding, and difficult count conditions. Some loyal participants filed their reports anyway and found interesting seabirds blown to shore with the storm. [This checklist contains eight species of tubenose](#), the strictly pelagic group of birds that includes albatrosses, shearwaters, and storm-petrels. Still, the weather had an impact: checklists from California are down considerably compared to last year.

In some parts of the U.S., this year's GBBC has been marked by relatively warm weather and an absence of snow and ice. With more open water available, northern participants are reporting a greater diversity of waterfowl. Participants often noted that they were seeing fewer birds at their feeders, compared to other years during the GBBC. That may also have something to do with milder weather. The birds may be finding more natural sources of food and visiting feeders less as a result.

## Early Migrations

The warm weather during the GBBC continued through the last two weeks of February, and that made it abundantly clear that this unprecedented February warmth in the eastern United States and eastern Canada kicked off early migration that started around GBBC time. Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles are well-known to arrive in late February, even as far north as the northernmost U.S. states and southern margins of Canada. This year however those two



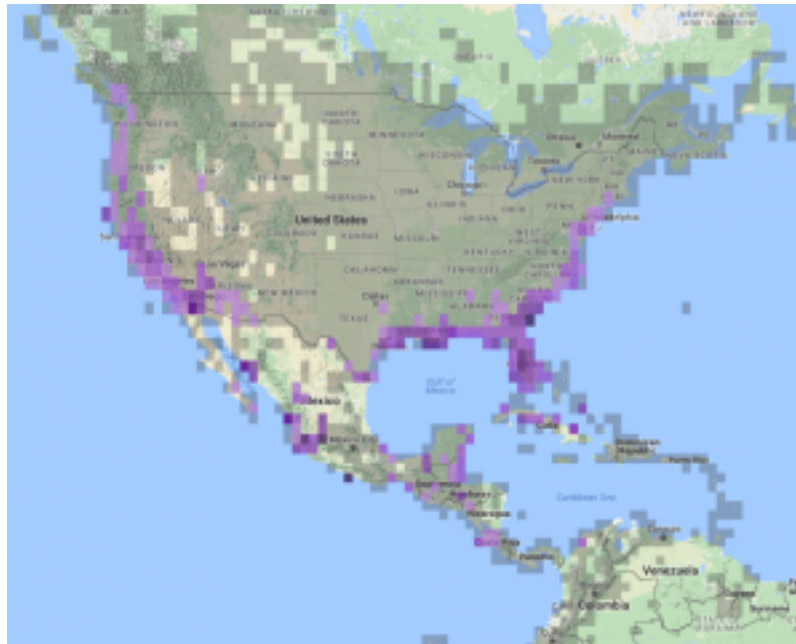
*Red-winged Blackbird by Tony Peebles, California, 2017 GBBC.*

blackbirds were even more widespread than normal and their numbers continued to build through February's final week. Comparing the [2017 GBBC map](#) to the [January 2017 map from eBird](#) shows how much migration was already underway by mid-February.

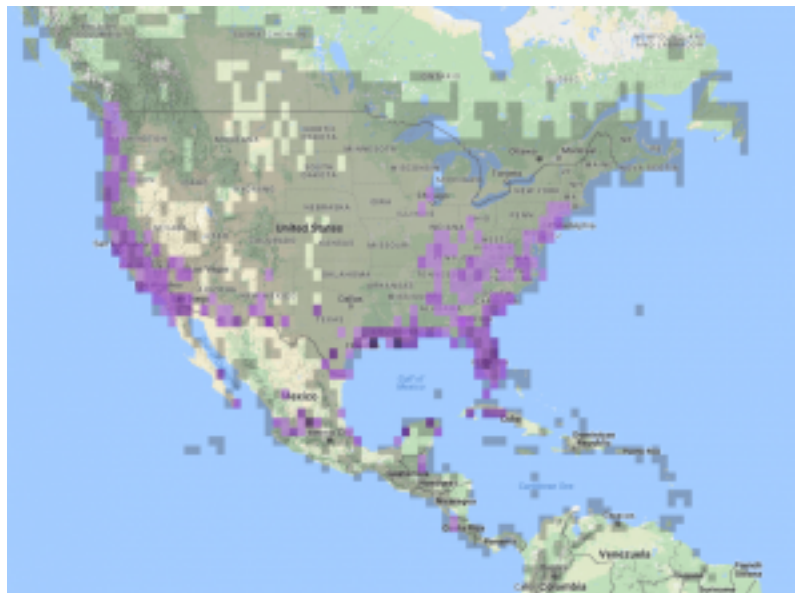
Two shorebirds that eschew the shore are also early migrants, with arrivals of Killdeer and American Woodcock apparent in New England and the Great Lakes states where they don't really overwinter. Those arrivals continued to build through February and while these species sometimes stay south until mid-March, they are already widespread and displaying on territory in many areas as we write.

Most exceptional have been arrivals of Tree Swallows well north of normal range, a species that usually waits until March to start coming back, since their flying insect food is not usually out until later in the spring. While some Tree Swallows overwintered on the East Coast in January 2017 as far north as Long Island, all the inland birds reported on the GBBC were part of a remarkable early push that continued into February. Though most areas have not seen large numbers yet, these early scouts probably set record early dates in many areas this year. For example, according to eBird, Quebec and northern Illinois had their first-ever February records this year and Massachusetts, which had two records of returning migrants in February previously (both from 2014), added four more this year. If the warm weather continues, we could see the earliest spring ever for bird migration in the eastern United States: watch for a wave of Eastern Phoebes, Pine Warblers, and Chipping Sparrows next!

## 2017 GBBC Tree Swallow Reports



## Tree Swallow eBird reports in January 2017



Please continue to use eBird, where you can document your bird observations **year round**, since your observations and photo-documentation of early arriving birds help to establish patterns that shed light on how unusual weather and long-term climate change are affecting our birds, their migrations, and their populations.



## Following the Cranes

some waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and Sandhill Cranes that are typically on the move in February. This pattern is often quite apparent in the short “snapshot” of the GBBC.

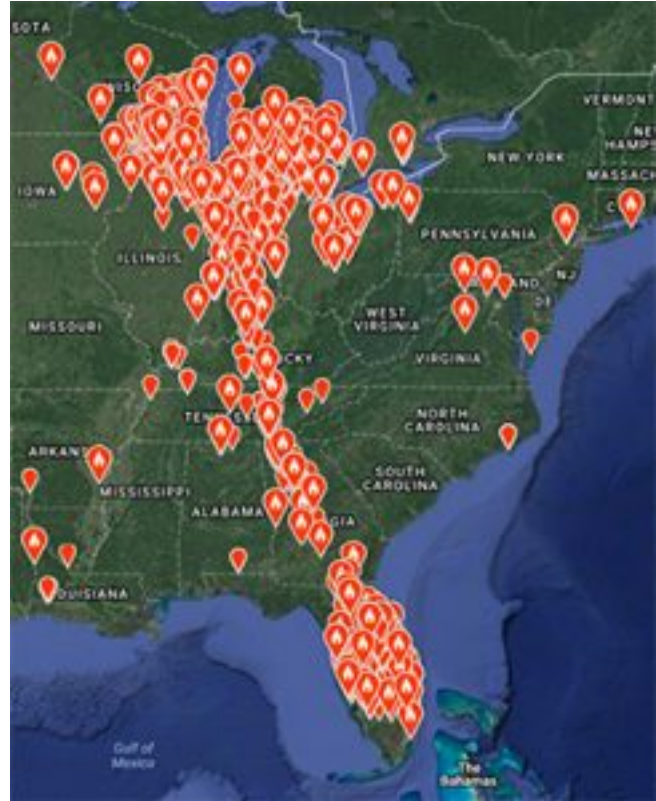
Sandhill Cranes that breed around the Great Lakes follow a well-defined fall migration route south through Illinois and Indiana, western Kentucky, central Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida. Their movement back from Florida is also well defined by GBBC reports (see map). They fly past several major cities: Atlanta, Chattanooga, Louisville, and Indianapolis, before they are split by Lake Michigan, with half heading north through Michigan and half heading west around the lake to Wisconsin.

Sandhill Cranes have a few distinct populations and not all of them start migrating in February. The cranes that move between the Great Lakes and Florida are known as "Greater" Sandhill Cranes and the eastern population has expanded significantly in recent years. They did not always overwinter in Alabama (so the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge population is a new phenomenon) and a number of eastern states have had their first breeding records in the last two to three decades, including New York, Pennsylvania, and all the New England states. eBird and GBBC help track these types of populations expansions, so it will be interesting to see what the future holds for Sandhill Cranes and if they continue to expand eastward and to migrate north earlier and earlier.

## Other Notable Reports

A few Great Gray Owls have been reported south of their normal Canadian range, probably in search of better food resources. Some lucky birders have encountered this majestic owl of the north woods in southern Canada with a few reaching northern New York, Minnesota, and Utah. The Great Gray Owl spotted near Massena, New York, caused enough excitement to make the local newspaper where you'll see [a great photo of the rock-star visitor!](#)

[Bohemian Waxwing](#) is a northern species that sometimes is sometimes irruptive and can turn up in large numbers south of their normal range. The Pacific Northwest, northern Rocky



GBBC reports clearly mark the northwesterly migration route of Florida's Sandhill Crane population.



*Bohemian Waxwing by Kelly Forkey, New York, 2017 GBBC.*

Mountains, most of southern Canada, and the northeastern U.S. are starting to see increased numbers of this rarer waxwing--larger and grayer than the Cedar Waxwing. [This count of 200 waxings from New Hampshire is noteworthy.](#) GBBC participant Kelly Forkey says she saw a flock of 40 Bohemian Waxwings in a crabapple tree during the count and she captured this great photo of one colorful visitor chowing down on winter berries!

These are just a few of the stories coming out of the GBBC. Take some time to do a little exploring on your own to see what's been reported where. The best place to start is with our [Explore a Region](#) tool. See what's happening across the world or in your neck of the woods. Or find out where a particular species has been reported using the [Species Map](#) tool where you enter a species and location.

And by all means keep reporting your birds! Now that you've got the GBBC under your belt, you can use the same login name and password to report birds from anywhere in the world at any time of the year using [eBird](#). The information is vital to scientists studying changes in the numbers and distributions of birds, and to conservation leaders who use the reports to craft targeted plans to preserve declining species.

***Thank you for participating in the  
Great Backyard Bird Count!***

***Thanks also to GBBC sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited.***

