

Join the Great Backyard Bird Count in February

By Rachel Oppedahl

A garden isn't a garden without birds. From the orange, black and white towhees scratching through fallen leaves for bugs, to hummers sipping on a red-flowering sage, we are blessed in the Sierra foothills by their visitations. If you're a bird lover, there's a special opportunity coming up: The Great Backyard Bird Count on February 12-15, conducted by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. During the four-day count, you can watch, record your sightings, and share them with bird watchers around the world.

Anyone can conduct a bird tally for as little as 15 minutes anytime during the event, then enter their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Each checklist submitted during the count helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. You also have the opportunity to share photos of the birds you see. And if you see a bird you can't identify, the GBBC offers a free bird identification app called Merlin, either in desktop or mobile platform: <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>.

Last year, more than a quarter million participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded. Other 2020 results included: 27,270,156 birds counted; 6,942 species of birds identified; and 194 countries represented in the count. During the four-day event, you can watch the tallies pour in live from around the world on Cornell Lab's site.

Both the national and local-chapter Audubon websites, <https://www.audubon.org> and <https://sierrafoothillsaudubon.org>, are rich with information and resources for bird lovers. With the Great Backyard Bird Count's [Explore Regions](#) tool, you can get a sneak peak at the kinds of birds you can expect to see in our area during the count. On the bird.org site, participants can see what others are reporting via real-time maps during and after the formal count. And any time of year, the Audubon site offers endless information about birds, like: how to tell the difference between a raven and a crow; how to find the best native plants for birds in your area; and of course, how you can help save species that are endangered.

Another wonderful resource for birders is eBird.org, managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. According to eBird, which says it is "the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen science project," their goal is to be a valuable data source. "From being able to manage lists, photos and audio recordings, to seeing real-time maps of species distribution, to alerts that let you know when species have been seen, we strive to provide the most current and useful information to the birding community."

So, participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count and become a Cornell Labs and Audubon “Community Citizen Scientist.” Happy birding!

Rachel Oppedahl is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County whose favorite bird at the moment is the spotted towhees that are first at the bird feeders each morning.

UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.