



# Bird Notes

From Northeast Kingdom Audubon  
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**For Immediate Release**

## The Birds are Leaping Ahead This Year

The four-day annual Great Backyard Bird Count is leaping ahead of last year, slightly. For those of you who participated on Feb 15-18, you have until the March 1st deadline (including an extra leap day) to enter your data. After all the data are gathered, scientists from the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology will look at some of the more notable trends and followup with a news release around mid-March. This event engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. At the GBBC website, [www.gbcbirdsource.org](http://www.gbcbirdsource.org), the numbers are streaming in every minute until the deadline. Select your state and you can watch the tallies increasing. In Vermont so far, 27,862 birds have been counted; in New Hampshire, 20,100. Of course these will be more by the deadline.

Let's look at some of the results. The upsurge of finches, grosbeaks and owls stands right out in this data snapshot. The big winner looks like the common redpoll (over 4000 so far), seen in very high numbers in Vermont and New Hampshire this winter. Pine and evening grosbeaks bounded ahead of last year's count, as did Bohemian waxwings. When the poor seed crop in Canada last year was reported, we did anticipate this surge. When the barred owl showed up at my feeder for several days, owl reports began to rise. I learned that the mouse and vole populations in Canada dropped due to the same lack of seeds, forcing the owls south to us. This is the picture that was missing last month, taken with a digital camera held up to a spotting scope, a process known as digiscoping, best used for identification purposes.



As long as this winter stays...well, wintery, we can expect to see the finches and owls and grosbeaks. Watch the feeders and keep them topped. The northern shrike has been noticed at feeders recently, with a report just in of one spitting up a pellet. This is not unlike the owl pellets full of the remains of its last meal. In this particular case, a redpoll was the meal. Here in our northern forests, another bird that caches food like the shrikes is the gray jay. This behavior gives this February breeder an advantage. Skipping ahead a few weeks, the females will be on three or four pale green, speckled eggs while snow piles up all around. What a leap of faith!

Happy Leap Year Birding!

Check out the NEK Audubon Birder's Calendar on our website, [www.nekaudubon.org](http://www.nekaudubon.org). Only a few left until next year.

Carolyn E. Boardman is a board member of NEK Audubon living in Brownington, Vermont. NEK Audubon is one of 8 chapters of Audubon Vermont and part of the National Audubon Society. NEK Audubon is a non-profit organization that encourages people's enjoyment of birds, wildlife and natural habitats through field trips, programs and publications. For previous Bird Notes, as well as, information about meetings, field trips and special events, visit [www.nekaudubon.org](http://www.nekaudubon.org). Art work by Robin Rothman.