



Bird Notes

From Northeast Kingdom Audubon
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For Immediate Release

Cabin Fever Cure

Another storm is on the way, a big one they say and I am waiting it out in the usual way, patience and bird watching. This is the month that tries the patience, the cabin fever month. But when winter's special bird visitors keep coming to the feeders and flying over the snowy landscape, it is hard to be tired of this time of year. During the recent Great Backyard Bird Count I got lucky. Five pine grosbeaks arrived along with common redpolls, the northern shrike and many others. The entire state of Vermont contributed 78 species (77 last year) and over 40 thousand birds counted (31,587 last year). My electronic certificate (beautiful and suitable for framing) acknowledged my citizen scientist status and my important contribution to the understanding of the conservation of birds. This almost makes me look forward to the count next winter...almost.

But the cure for birders' cabin fever is, well more birds, only in this case, the early spring arrivals. The one that comes to mind as the best cure is the red-winged blackbird. Just that one sighting, that one report that happened this week, can make all the difference, just knowing they are on the way. Even though these birds are perhaps the most abundant bird in North America, with an estimated population of 190 million individuals in 1974, they still have spring harbinger status in my cabin.

Other winter visitors have been staying with us. The cedar and bohemian waxwings, the pine and evening grosbeaks, the common redpolls, pine siskins and crossbills are appearing in regular numbers at feeding stations and food trees/shrubs. The snowy owls are still dazzling us with their presence which biologists are now saying is due to the arctic species having done so well in its northern breeding grounds last year that competition is driving the young ones to warmer climates. I guess this is better news than the idea of a food shortage. A northern hawk owl is still being seen in Eden.

The important thing to remember about birdwatching is that you must get out of your cabin to do it. Recently the email lists are reporting furiously attesting to the fact that winter birdwatching is in fact a way to cure cabin fever. Another handy birdwatching related chore in winter is to listen to bird song cds to prepare your ears for spring birding. And of course surfing the web for bird information, always a good way to wait for spring. Of course you know about Cornell and Audubon. The NEK Audubon website does list birding field trips that just might get you out of your cabin for a day. Try it.

Happy Cabin Fever Birding!

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. Art work by Robin Rothman.