

Questionnaire:

1. How many years have you been feeding birds?
2. What kinds of feed do you use?
3. What are your most common birds?
4. Is there a change in the species that visit your feeders?
5. Have you noticed an increase or decline in the numbers and/or species this winter.
6. If so, what birds are in decline?
7. If there is a decline, in your opinion, what is the cause?

Survey Results:

From the seventy-four surveys we received, the average number of years that the bird watchers fed birds at backyard feeders was 12.7 years. The longest someone had been feeding birds that answered our survey was forty-four years.

The food most commonly used at backyard feeders was sunflower seed (56), suet (35), niger and mixed seed (27) and cracked corn (16). The most common birds that visit these feeders regularly are Blue Jay (61), chickadees (55), sparrows (28), starlings (24), and woodpeckers and gold finches (21).

Forty-two (42) people out of the 74 surveys said there was a change in the species of birds visiting backyard feeders. Twenty-eight (28) people said there was no change in the species of birds visiting backyard feeders on Prince Edward Island. Sixty-two (62) of the respondents felt there was a decrease in the numbers of birds visiting backyard feeders on Prince Edward Island. Only three (3) people said there was an increase and nine (9) said it's about the same. The survey results read that finches (28) are declining the most, grosbeaks (23) are second and sparrows (14) are third in order of decline.



The largest percentage of the people who answered our survey were not sure of the cause (24). Eighteen (18) of the people said that they thought it was the snow cover (more food available because of the lack of snow this winter). Fifteen people said it is pesticides. Other reasons given were less natural food, habitat destruction, more feeders, predation and lots of natural food. One interesting thought mentioned was the high winds and the number of hurricanes on the east coast this year.

Conclusion:

According to our survey, there is a decline in the number of birds at backyard feeders. Also, there is a change in the species of birds that will visit backyard feeders this year of Prince Edward Island.

The cause of the decline is not clear. Our expert opinion points to a lack of tree seed and berries this winter although some people who answered our survey said there are more tree cones. Lack of snow cover means birds may be getting more natural food.

In conclusion, we feel that the numbers of feeder birds on P.E.I. would have to be surveyed for several years to know if there really is a noticeable decline.

Editor's Note: Tyler Fraser and Shane Thompson were grade 9 students at Stonepark Intermediate School and conducted this study as their Science Fair Project in the spring of 1997. They are to be commended for their thoughtfulness in designing and implementing the project as well as their use of the media to encourage people to respond to their questionnaire. This article is an excerpt of the major sections of their report.