

- December 4: Scott Makepeace will speak on the Use of Prince Edward Island Forest Habitats by Birds at the Natural History Society's monthly meeting. The meeting will start at 7:30 P.M. at the Farm Centre on University Avenue. Members and guests are welcome.
- December 16: The Natural History Society will sponsor the National Park Christmas Bird Count. (refer to the article in the newsletter).
- December 26: The Hillsborough Christmas Bird Count will be sponsored by the Society. (refer to the article in this newsletter).
- December 29: The Montague Fun count will be hosted by the Society. For further information refer to the enclosed article.
- January 8: Louise Wootton will be the guest speaker at the Annual Meeting of the Natural History Society. She will show slides and speak on "The Exploration of Hydrothermal Vents and Other British Columbia Undersea Adventures". Ann Wootton described these vents in terms of tiny underwater volcanoes.

#### PROJECT FEEDERWATCH

Erica H. Dunn, Coordinator

For Folks who feed birds, hordes of hungry finches certainly put a dent in pocketbooks last winter. According to Project FeederWatch, a continent wide survey of birds at backyard feeders, one of the biggest seed guzzlers was the Pine Siskin. This "boom-or-bust" species periodically leaves the boreal forests of Canada to invade the southern United States in spectacular numbers, and the winter of 1989-90 was definitely one of the boom years. Siskins were reported at 64% of feeders across the continent, compared with only 30% of feeders the winter before. Red-breasted Nuthatches joined the invading finches; FeederWatchers reported twice as many as the previous winter. Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls also visited feeders in large numbers, mainly in northern regions, while Purple Finches were abundant in the south.

What causes the periodic, dramatic increases in feeder visits from finches and nuthatches? The answer in a nutshell: they're searching for food. In the wild, these birds eat seeds -- not garden-variety sunflower or niger, but the seeds of trees, especially conifers such as spruce and fir. Conifers produce a bumper seed crop every few years and a paltry supply in the intervening ones. Scientists speculate that this pattern represents a clever reproductive strategy for the trees -- in the "off" years, pickings are slim for seed-eating animals. They have few offspring and their numbers remain low. Then, in a good year, the seed eaters are overwhelmed. They can't possibly gobble up all the seeds produced, and as a result, the seeds are left lying around to germinate and grow.

The significance to bird watchers? During a year of plenty, more birds have babies and more babies survive. The following year, when seeds are scarce, may young birds head south and end up perched on well-stocked feeders.

The 1990-91 season begins soon. From November through April, FeederWatch participants will observe their feeders on one or two days every two weeks. They'll record their sightings on computer-readable forms, so that the results can be compiled and analysed quickly at the Lab of Ornithology. After sending their data to the lab they'll read about results in FeederWatch News, a twice-yearly newsletter that provides midseason and annual summaries and population analyses. FeederWatch News also includes tips on feeding birds, reports of unusual and amusing sightings, and information on the behavior and ecology of common feeder species.

If you can accurately identify the birds at your feeders, you're invited to join Project FeederWatch for the 1990-91 season. A \$12 subscription fee