

HALF A MILLION AND COUNTING:

Great '98 Backyard Bird Count Puts El Nino's Effect on the Map!

Nearly 14,000 bird enthusiasts of all ages across North America reported more than half a million birds at feeders, local parks, and natural areas in the first-ever Great '98 Backyard Bird Count, Feb. 20-22, cosponsored by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology (CLO) and the National Audubon Society (NAS). And this spring, birdwatchers can keep counting for the birds by participating in BirdSource's upcoming project, Warbler Watch.

Early findings from the Great '98 Backyard Bird Count are revealing that El Niño may have influenced where certain species spent their winter months. "Meteorologists predicted that El Niño would mean a milder winter for those of us here in the Northeast, and we're seeing evidence of that in bird distributions," says Frank Gill, Senior Vice President for Science at NAS. "American Robins and Red-winged Blackbirds generally spend the winter in southerly locales. The Great '98 count is showing them in far greater numbers than usual farther north, including Maine, Vermont, and elsewhere across the northern states and provinces."

Reports poured in from all states and provinces, with New York, Texas, Maine, and Florida showing the busiest flurry of count activity. Mourning Dove, Black-capped Chickadee, and Northern Cardinal were the most reported species. The general public is invited to visit the BirdSource Web site and view findings in the form of colourful graphs, maps, and charts. Images as well as bird songs and calls are also accessible at the site, and an animated map shows when reports came in from across the continent.

Those who participated in the Great '98 Backyard Bird Count put their towns on the first map of its kind in ornithological history. Those who didn't can still contribute to scientists' understanding of birds by participating in Warbler Watch, taking place this spring. Like the Great '98 count, Warbler Watch will combine the unique and powerful partnership of the continent's citizen birdwatchers with the state-of-the-art technology of BirdSource. This endeavour will track the migratory movements and breeding distribution of North America's warblers--some of which, like the handsome, sky-blue Cerulean Warbler, are experiencing severe and long-term population declines.

Stay tuned for upcoming news about Warbler Watch, and visit the BirdSource Web site <<http://birdsource.cornell.edu>> often in the upcoming months for the latest developments. "The Great '98 Backyard Bird Count has proven to be a great success," says John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. "We've taken a new step in the process of engaging citizens across the country to become involved in gathering information about birds. With the continued participation of citizen scientists, Warbler Watch '98 will be just as successful as the Great '98 Backyard Bird Count."

TWO APRIL SURPRISES:

by Bill Hunter

A remarkable thing happened on April 1st. I was here in the study, trying to find a missing computer file when I was distracted by my dog's