

## YARD BIRDS

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*Editors note: A post on Massbird asking if birders had yard lists that they would like to share has elicited the following responses to date. I think we can agree with Rick Heil's observation that "just about any yard, even if there is only one tree and a patch of sky, can produce an interesting and diverse list of species if the observer is diligent enough." We encourage readers to continue sending their observations to brookestev@aol.com*

I don't think I have an actual count but I do have some interesting sightings. I built a pond and waterfall in my back yard about 5 years ago. Since then I have had a Northern Waterthrush, Blackburnian Warbler drinking, Wilson's Warbler, Black-throated Blue and Yellow warblers, and two years in a row I had a Cooper's Hawk. This year I had Pine Siskins. I had the only Red Crossbills reported in RI several years ago. They came into the hemlock trees that line the edge of my yard. I have tried to plant numerous native trees and shrubs and those that bear fruit to attract birds. I think the running water is the big draw. I live on the east side of Providence in a residential neighborhood. I have a small backyard with the pond and a small vegetable garden.

*Alan Strauss*

*Providence, RI* 🐦

Mainly, we get finches, sparrows and starlings with two pair of cardinals and a few jays. Once in a while, something surprising lands – a Northern Goshawk once and a Merlin this past month. I have a special connection to birds of prey and find myself always on the alert for a raptor passing through. I live on a main road that is a noisy well-traveled route by humans and there are three huge Norway maples surrounding my property. They are home to flickers and squirrels, crows, starlings and sparrows. I keep my feeders stocked but seem to mainly feed finches and sparrows, though I have a foursome of cardinals and a couple of noisy jays. One of them landed on my head. The goshawk passed through a year ago last November, the day before I went out hawkking with Paul Roberts. The Merlin was here just a couple of weeks ago. These are the most unusual of my "yard birds." I did have a wounded crow take shelter before a nor'easter in my garage. His wing was broken and he let us pick him up and bring him into our house. We cared for him for about 48 hours before taking him to the wildlife rehabilitator in Ipswich.

*Elise Caswell*

*Marblehead, MA* 🐦

Our yard is in the northwest corner of the town of York, Maine, a semi-rural area that is rapidly being developed. However, significant open space remains by virtue of wetlands laws, land trust purchases around Mount Agementicus, and large lot sizes in our immediate vicinity. The yard itself is 4+ acres of second growth woodland dominated by white pine (last cut about 1920). The only open area is our "lawn" (about

half an acre). Our property is bounded on the west by several hundred acres of pine/oak woodland, and on the north by 20+ acres of mowed fields and other open areas punctuated by a few houses. We moved here in late December 1998, so 1999 was our first year in residence. After a slow start we were pleasantly surprised and sometimes even amazed by the variety of birds we eventually saw and heard — a total of 73 species for the year.

Of special interest were several male Blackburnian Warblers that vocalized throughout the nesting season, but we observed no other breeding activity. Two common birds not yet on our list are European Starling and House Sparrow. We missed out on the winter finch craze this past season, but are looking forward to adding Cape May Warbler among others to our list this spring!

Our “top ten” yard birds for 1999:

Black-billed Cuckoo (August)  
 Red-bellied Woodpecker (winter 99/00;  
 a hotline bird in these parts)  
 Tennessee Warbler (May)  
 American Woodcock (local nester --  
 PEENT!)  
 Great Horned Owl (winter only, so far)

Red-shouldered Hawk (local nester)  
 Philadelphia Vireo (May)  
 Swamp Sparrow (October)  
 Golden-crowned Kinglet (common in  
 winter 98/99 but very sporadic this  
 past winter)  
 Snow Goose (fall flyover)

Other frequently seen local nesters:

Common Raven  
 Pileated Woodpecker  
 Broad-winged Hawk  
 Cooper's Hawk  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk  
 Scarlet Tanager

Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
 Eastern Bluebird  
 Wood Thrush  
 Veery  
 Black-throated Green Warbler  
 Ovenbird

*Scott Cronenweth and Rebecca Lovejoy*  
*Cape Neddick, ME* ↗

Although I recently sold the property and no longer live there, between 1 February 1992 and 14 January 2000 I recorded 175 species on or over my 1.75 acre yard on Chase Street in West Newbury. The habitat is mostly young to medium-aged deciduous woods, with a few small grassy meadows and lawn. At the rear was a view of a small pond (perhaps 20,000 sq.ft.) and wooded swamp. The location is about eight miles inland from Plum Island on the southeast side of Pipestave Hill and adjacent to the well-known hawk watching site at the Page School.

Highlights of the list include the following: thirteen species of diurnal raptors including many sightings of Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon; a flyover adult breeding-plumaged Franklin's Gull on 10 May 1992; five species of owls including Barn and Long-eared; two Ravens soaring overhead, calling on 15 May 1992; three observations for Bohemian Waxwing with five seen eating multiflora berries on 14 January 1994; twenty-five species of warblers including a Worm-eating 17 September 1993, and a

MacGillivray's watched for 20 minutes along an herbaceous border of a meadow 14 October 1996; at least seven Dickcissels, several of which were calling flyovers; a Gambell's race of the White-crowned Sparrow coming to seed in late October 1997; both crossbills; and Hoary Redpoll at feeders with large flocks of Commons on several occasions, including two on 19 January 1994.

Other noteworthy birds seen, some on multiple occasions, were Great Cormorant, Iceland Gull, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Northern Shrike, Mourning Warbler, and Lapland Longspur. Some of the worst misses in the eight years were Black-crowned Night-Heron, Bufflehead, Winter Wren, Yellow-throated Vireo, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Snow Bunting.

*Richard S. Heil*  
*West Newbury, MA* 🐦

Here is my yard list. It is notable only because my yard is 20 x 50 feet in the middle of Boston's South End. It is a "sunken garden" with several flowering trees and lots of ivy and small shrubs. And it will be my yard not much longer; we are moving to Jamacia Plain in a few months, where my immediate yard will be about 140 x 100, and my big yard will be the Arnold Arboretum just 3 blocks away! Anyway here is the list of thirty-two species:

Black-crowned Night-Heron (overflights)	Hermit Thrush (seen every year since 1996; latest was December 1998)
Peregrine Falcon (overflights — from the Christian Science Center)	American Robin
Herring Gull	European Starling
Rock Dove	Gray Catbird
Mourning Dove	Northern Mockingbird
Barred Owl (for about 2 weeks in December 1995)	Brown Thrasher
Common Nighthawk (they have nested on my gravel roof)	Blackpoll Warbler
Downy Woodpecker	Black-and-white Warbler
Hairy Woodpecker	American Redstart
Northern Flicker	Ovenbird (seen every year since 1995; nested in neighbor's yard in 1996)
Blue Jay	Common Yellowthroat
American Crow (nested in large White Pine on edge of property)	Wilson's Warbler
Black-capped Chickadee	White-throated Sparrow
White-breasted Nuthatch	Dark-eyed Junco
	Northern Cardinal
	House Finch
	American Goldfinch
	House Sparrow

*Bob Mayer*  
*Boston, MA* 🐦

I do not have a yard list since my yard lacks any trees and we were only supposed to be here five years. We just passed twelve years. There are two birds, though, I would like to share. Living in Randolph, I am landlocked. Once, I looked up and saw a Northern Harrier up several hundred feet making a beeline for the coast. This was in July. Another time I was working in the yard with headphones listening to music. I heard a familiar whistle from above. Taking off the headphones and looking skyward I saw a Whimbrel following the same path as the harrier did. I whistled to it. I saw it veer and look down at the yard. It changed course and flew directly south-south-east. I woke up one May morning to hear an Orchard Oriole in a tree across the street. It was a first year male.

*Glenn d'Entremont*  
*Randolph, MA* ↗

When we bought a house in Stoughton in 1987, we bought it for the back yard – a long narrow plot edged with trees and lots of multiflora rose. So far, our yard list has 88 species, somewhat impressive as we are rarely home to look. While we have seen Common Loons, 3 species of heron, 6 species of hawks, both cuckoos, and 11 species of warblers, certain unusual birds stand out in our memories. In May of 1997 there was a White-eyed Vireo that stayed for two days, foraging in the multiflora and singing. In May of 1999, our first Indigo Bunting, a vibrant male, appeared at our mixed seed feeder. During the fall 1999 invasion, finally, a Red-breasted Nuthatch appeared. Other memorable birds have included a weird, light-colored Ring-necked Pheasant (11/99, see <http://larsonweb.org/birds/pheasant.html>), and an out-of-place Northern Bobwhite (6/95), never seen but heard calling from a spruce. One evening in May of 1995, we found 5 White-crowned Sparrows foraging under our suet feeder. A Mallard hen and 5 chicks spent a day under our feeders one summer (three *very* busy blocks from the nearest pond), followed the next year by a hen and two very attentive drakes, but no chicks. In 1993, we had a brief October invasion of Evening Grosbeaks. In 1999, we finally had our first owl, an Eastern Screech Owl, calling on 9/25.

In the spring of 1998 we had a budgie visiting our feeders for a few days (obviously an escape), clearly fearless and clueless. We prefer not to speculate on its eventual fate, except to suggest that being oblivious and outlandishly colored is a bad combination.

Probably the most frustrating bird for our yard has been Common Nighthawk. We used to live in Newton, and came to take for granted a great nighthawk show in the evening in the fall. Since moving, we have seen one nighthawk in Stoughton in 9/88, another a few years later, and none again until September, 1999, when we saw several in what appears to have been an odd migration year.

So far, our choice of a domicile based on the backyard has worked out pretty well, although Dan Furbish clearly has us beat.

*David Larson and Susan Carlson*  
*Stoughton, MA* ↗