

Great Backyard Bird Count provides global purpose on February 17-20: Perfect conservation activity for Family Day weekend

It's a busy time of year for The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Birds Canada, and the National Audubon Society.

On February 17, 18, 19, and 20, these three esteemed conservation organizations will be encouraging nature lovers across the world to watch birds in their backyards or other favorite settings and report their findings.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual event that invites participants to take a break from their hectic lives and count the birds. It provides a welcome break from the winter blahs often associated with February and is a perfect activity for Family Day 2023. However, the main reason February is chosen is that most birds around the world have not begun their spring migration and the international bird population is at its most stationary.

Kristen Martyn, who is the owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, is a local proponent of the Great Backyard Bird Count and related conservation measures to protect avian populations. Kristen took time from her busy schedule of caring for her newborn twins, managing her store, and being a conservation activist to respond to our interview questions:

The Auroran: How can local residents participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count 2023?

Kristen Martyn: Participation is easy and free. All you need to do is identify and count the birds you see in your yard (or any other location you wish) for at least 15 mins February 17-20, 2023. You can participate on all days or whichever day(s) you are available to do so. After your count is complete, you upload your results on eBird (registration is free). If you are new to bird identification, the Merlin Bird ID app is a great tool. If you have participated in the count before, you can upload your results on the eBird Mobile app or on eBird.org. For more information on how to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count, visit birdcount.org

The Auroran: How will your store be assisting birders and conservationists with this year's Bird Count?

Kristen Martyn: As the founding sponsor of the Great Backyard Bird Count, at Wild Birds Unlimited, this is one of our favourite events of the year! We have lots of resources available in store to help with identification, optics for viewing birds, and a variety of bird feeders and foods to attract the birds to your yard. We provide guidance on how to participate through conversations in store and with our online community via our social channels. Every year, we also send out reminder emails before the count to assist people in signing up and participating.

The Auroran: Why is the Bird Count an important event that local residents should care about?

Kristen Martyn: By participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, you are participating in the world's largest biodiversity-related community science project. Your information becomes part of an extensive database that is analyzed by scientists to better understand important trends in bird populations, range expansions, habitat changes, and shifts in migration patterns. Tragically, recent studies have shown that we have lost 2.9 billion birds in North America since 1970. Participating in community science projects is an easy way for anyone to take action and help birds.

The Auroran: What's the most rewarding part of operating a Wild Birds Unlimited store?

Kristen Martyn: Coming from a background in conservation work, I really value being able to assist with bird and wildlife conservation on a direct grassroots level in the community. This is a big motivation for our team as well. We are genuinely passionate about birds, wildlife, and the backyard bird feeding hobby. Being able to educate people every day about creating bird habitat in their yard and help birds through simple everyday actions (preventing window strikes, keeping cats indoors, and planting native plants) has a direct impact on the lives of our local birds and wildlife. Collectively, the more we work together as a community to help birds and wildlife, the bigger an impact we will have. My goal each and every day is to contribute to

conservation efforts to help birds and wildlife. It's extremely rewarding. I love hearing and celebrating the individual success stories from our customers and community.

The Auroran: Any words of encouragement to aspiring birders as the Big Day arrives?

Martyn: Absolutely! If you are new to bird identification and bird watching, this is a great event to get you started. The birding community is so welcoming, and we encourage all skill levels to participate. If you need help with bird ID feel free to visit us in store, send an email or post on our social communities. We would be more than happy to help and there are also many other online groups and resources to assist you as well. This is the perfect event to get kids interested in the nature in their own backyards. So, I would strongly encourage parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, community leaders, and others to invite children to participate with them and to get them involved. Lastly, remember that birds really need our help and with as little as 15 minutes of your time, you can directly assist with bird conservation! Is there any better motivation than that?! Happy counting everyone!

Kristen Martyn also provided a helpful link to invite readers to engage in bird conservation measures: www.3billionbirds.org.

Lastly, Martyn encouraged prospective birders to engage in photographing birds: ?One thing I would add is that anyone with a camera is encouraged to take and share photos on their count lists. This is a really fun part of the count. It's an interactive way of connecting with other participants all over the globe. If you have time, I highly recommend looking at the photos. [www.birdcount.org/learn/photos.?](http://www.birdcount.org/learn/photos.)

If you enjoy the Great Backyard Bird Count, consider counting the birds in your yard every week from November-April for the Project FeederWatch. feederwatch.org.

By Jim Stewart