

Great Backyard Bird Count Provides Global Purpose on February 17-20]

By **Jim Stewart**

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 Caledon Citizen: 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 Caledon Citizen: 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 Caledon Citizen: Any words of encouragement to aspiring birders as the Big Day arrives?

Kristen 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!