

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

The Great Backyard Bird Count begins

By [Natalie Devlin](#)

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COLUMBIA — The Great Backyard Bird Count kicked off on Friday and will continue around the country through Monday.

The four-day event is held annually, often in February. All you have to do to participate is count the birds in your backyard and mark down how many you find of each kind. The [count's website](#) has a list of the different birds in each region of the country to help people recognize them, as well as the necessary checklists to participate.

The purpose of the event is to collect data nationwide on different species of birds. [The data](#) from over the years is compiled and posted on the website.

Although the count is held just once a year, bird-watching is a common Columbia pastime. The Columbia Audubon Society started in 1958 and has been a presence in the local bird-watching scene since. Howard Hinkel, president of the Columbia Audubon Society, said bird-watching is "pretty popular nationwide and even worldwide."

Columbia businesses such as [Songbird Station](#) and [Better Bird Watching](#) have been trying to promote the count. Songbird Station offers free information in the store on how to participate, including bird guides for Columbia.

Joe LaFleur, who owns Better Bird Watching, supports the event because "it helps to promote an interest in bird watching," which is the reason he started his business. LaFleur makes DVDs about bird-watching that are sold nationwide.

Recommended bird-watching sites in the area include Grindstone Nature Area, Eagle Bluff Conservation Area, Forum Nature Area, Rock Bridge State Park and, of course, your backyard.

Hinkel said birds are "more active and visible in the morning hours, say dawn to noon and the late afternoon hours."

Mel Toellner, owner of Songbird Station, recommends "nature-scaping" as a way to attract birds to your house. Birds that don't eat out of bird feeders will sometimes respond to plants or bird houses.

The most effective way to attract a lot of birds is to put in a bird bath with heated running water, Toellner said. They will be more attracted to water that is moving, even if it's only a little bit. Toellner makes [online videos](#) with little tips about bird-watching.

Toellner's most important advice to potential bird-watchers is to be patient. Stay in one spot for five minutes, he advised.

"It will amaze you what you will see in those five minutes," he said.