

Finally Fall: New Jersey Fall and Winter Visitors

Learn about animals that migrate from the north to visit New Jersey in the colder months.

A common image many people think of when speaking about animal migration is birds flying south for the winter, or the monarchs that travel up to 3,000 miles to reach the warmer forests of Mexico, but some birds from far up north migrate to New Jersey to prepare for the colder months. They come here in search for food and sometimes, breeding purposes.

New Jersey sees many **irruptive migrants**. These are species that usually don't migrate far but will occasionally make larger migrations in sizable groups in pursuit for food during the winter months.

Not every year is an irruptive year, for example we saw irruptive migrant species on the move in the winters of 2013-2014, 2017-2018, and now 2020-2021. When it is an irruptive year, we notice the same occasional migrants making their way to NJ during the winter, and many can be seen at Duke Farms. Our on-and-off visitors include pine siskins, red-breasted nuthatches, evening grosbeaks, snowy owls, and even a well-known NJ species, the blue jay.

Occasional irruptive species you might find in New Jersey during the colder months.



Evening grosbeak



Pine siskin



Snowy owl

Pine Siskin

Pine siskins that are found in New Jersey in the winter, likely migrate from Maine and the lower parts of Canada. Even starting as early as September in 2020, these little finches can be tracked migrating south of their normal range. Pine siskins are often mistaken for other finches and even sparrows but can be distinguished by their yellow patches.

Want to attract pine siskins to your feeder? They prefer thistle, nyjer, and hulled sunflower seeds. As a smaller finch, they prefer seeds that are easier to eat, like the hulled sunflower seeds, and have also been seen gathering under feeders to clean up the scrapes from larger birds.

Listen to pine siskin calls [here](#).

Learn more about pine siskins [here](#).



Red-breasted Nuthatch

These little birds aren't usually seen in New Jersey, but as early as July during an irruptive year, they have been seen searching for food. In the winter, red-breasted nuthatches eat conifer seeds like pine nuts, and insects throughout the year when available.

If you're looking to attract red-breasted nuthatches to your feeder, they prefer peanuts, sunflower seeds, and also suet feeders. If you would like to create food and habitat for these little birds, consider planting various native conifer trees in your area.

Listen to red-breasted nuthatch calls [here](#).
Learn more about red-breasted nuthatches [here](#).



Evening Grosbeak

The evening grosbeak is another migrant finch species that occasionally can be found moving south during the winter, and often aren't found in New Jersey aside from irruptive seasons. Males are easily detectable by their bright yellow bodies and eyebrow stripe, while females have duller colors.

These larger finches (unlike the pine siskin) are able to eat bigger seeds like sunflower seeds with the shell still on it, and also enjoy seeds from maple, ash, elm, and pine trees and fruits from native fruit trees.

Listen to evening grosbeak calls [here](#).
Learn more about evening grosbeaks [here](#).



Snowy Owl

The snowy owl is quite a majestic creature. They spend their time as far north as Greenland during their breeding season, and unlike short-distant migrants, snowy owls will travel as far as Texas or Florida in search of food during irruptive years. Owls are birds of prey, which means that they hunt (usually for mammals) rather than forage for seeds and fruits.

Listen to snowy owl calls [here](#).
Learn more about snowy owls [here](#).



[Source](#)



Blue Jays

New Jersey is home to many blue jays year-round, but occasionally, individuals that normally reside farther north will make their way to New Jersey during the fall and winter in search for food. This means that during irruption years, there will be many more blue jays to watch and observe!

Want to attract blue jays to your feeders?
They prefer suet and sunflower seeds.

Listen to blue jay calls [here](#).
Learn more about blue jays [here](#).



Additional Resources

- [12 Types of Bird Migration](#)
- [Cornell FeederWatch Cam](#)
- [Strange Visitors from the North: Irruptive Migrants](#)



Activity 1: Irruptive Species Count

Use either the space below or your own nature journal to keep track of which irruptive species you see and how many! Take note of any other species you see.

	Notes (Where did you see them, what were they doing, were they alone or in a group, etc.)	Tally
Pine siskin		
Red-breasted nuthatch		
Evening grosbeak		
Snowy owl		
Blue Jay		



Activity 2: Bird Bingo for an Irruptive Year

Have this bingo sheet with you when you go for a walk or a drive, or you can have it handy while watching the Cornell FeederWatch Cam linked below in additional resources. How many birds can you find? Use any other sources to help ID the birds you see.

 <p>Dark-eyed junco</p>	 <p>Black-capped chickadee</p>	 <p>Northern harrier hawk</p>	 <p>Short-eared owl</p>	 <p>American robin</p>
 <p>Mourning dove</p>	 <p>Northern cardinal</p>	 <p>American goldfinch</p>	 <p>American kestrel</p>	 <p>Carolina wren</p>
 <p>Turkey vulture</p>	 <p>Red-breasted nuthatch</p>	 <p>FREE SPACE</p>	 <p>Tufted titmouse</p>	 <p>House finch</p>
 <p>Pine siskin</p>	 <p>Great horned owl</p>	 <p>Evening grosbeak</p>	 <p>Red-tailed hawk</p>	 <p>Northern flicker</p>
 <p>Bald eagle</p>	 <p>Red-bellied woodpecker</p>	 <p>Snowy owl</p>	 <p>Downy woodpecker</p>	 <p>Blue jay</p>