Wild Bird Habitat Store

November Newsletter - 2026

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Connecting people with birds right in their own backyards Since 1993

November Bird Notes:

- Winter birds will make themselves plentiful around the bird feeders.
- Watch the skies as ducks and geese, the last to migrate, begin to move south.
- Now is time to check the bird bath heater to provide fresh water during the winter.
- Continue to watch your feeders for new birds either showing up or passing through.
- Goldfinches and juncos from the north are arriving. Will the Pine Siskins?
- Consider relocating your bird feeders for easy filling and viewing from indoors.
- It's a great time to expand your bird feeding program with a different kind of bird feeder that will attract new birds to your backyard during winter.
- Get a friend or relative started feeding birds. Buy them a bird feeder for Christmas.

From the owners and staff at the Wild Bird Habitat Stores

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Fun turkey facts on page 8



Common Redpoll



The Common Redpoll is an irruptive northern bird species. Generally, a few are observed during the winter in Nebraska visiting backyard bird feeders. However, this may be the winter when they become more common from November through April. Why? The 2026 winter forecast indicates that due to exceptionally poor seed crops on the trees in the Boreal forests of Canada, combined with the boom in a successful redpoll nesting season, the central U.S. is on high alert for significant redpoll movements south. They are already being sighted weeks ahead of schedule in nearby states.

WINGTIP: On eBird.com you can see if, when, and where people may be seeing redpolls as well as other common seasonal and irruptive bird species during the winter months across Nebraska

The Common Redpoll is a hardy little finch from the far north. They are a small, sparrow-sized finch about 5 inches in length with brown-streaked sides, a pale underside, a small yellow bill, and a distinctive red forehead patch. Adult males often have a rosy-pink chest, while females are generally more heavily streaked and lack the prominent pink breast.

As winter settles in across Nebraska, many birdwatchers often keep an eye on their feeders for unexpected visitors from the north and one of the most interesting of these winter wanderers is the Common Redpoll, built to survive some of the coldest conditions in North America.



Redpolls are active, social birds that rarely sit still for long. They chatter constantly as they move through trees and shrubs, often hanging upside down to reach seeds on the tips of branches. Their busy movements and distinctive calls make a flock of redpolls an entertaining sight during the winter either in natural habitats or at backyard bird feeding stations.

WINGTIP: In past years during an irruption of Common Redpolls I have seen them so abundant at the thistle feeder that goldfinches have a difficult time securing a perch to feed from.



Although Common Redpolls are not guaranteed visitors, their arrival is one of the pleasures of winter bird feeding. In the winter, redpolls will frequently visit backyard feeders, particularly those that are well stocked with Nyjer thistle seed. They will also eat small sunflower seeds or chips and pick up fallen seeds beneath feeders.

WINGTIP: Since redpolls cannot be counted on to visit every winter, bird enthusiasts can make their yards more inviting by providing suitable food, water, and a safe environment to attract a flock that may quickly become a regular visitor while food remains available.

The appearance of redpolls in Nebraska illustrates how closely bird movements are tied to natural food supplies. Birch, alder, and other northern trees produce seeds that are important to redpolls. When seed crops are poor, these birds may travel hundreds of miles south in search of better feeding opportunities. While weather can influence their movements, it's not the cold temperatures that explain their irruption. It's the availability of food across their vast northern range that plays an important role in determining how far south they travel.

Common Redpolls breed across the far northern regions of North America and Eurasia. Their breeding habitat includes Arctic tundra with scattered shrubs, as well as open woodlands containing birch, willow, alder, spruce, and other northern trees.

These birds are remarkably well adapted to cold weather. Their thick winter plumage provides insulation, and they can fluff their feathers to trap warm air close to their bodies. One particularly fascinating behavior is their habit of tunneling beneath the snow to create sheltered sleeping places. Snow can provide insulation from bitter nighttime temperatures.

WINGTIP: A redpoll will dive off a branch using its stubby bill and head to break through the crust or surface of light snow. Once inside, it burrows horizontally from about 4 inches to over a foot long tunnel to shield itself completely from biting winds and sub-zero temperatures. They can survive to -65 degrees. When the sun warms the air the next day, the birds pop straight up out of their snow caves, leaving small craters behind in the blanket of snow.



Redpolls also have an unusual way of gathering food. They possess expandable pouches in their throats where they can temporarily store seeds while continuing to forage. They can then retreat to a safer, sheltered location or in their overnight cave to remove the seed husks and eat.

The breeding season begins during the short Arctic summer, when food becomes more abundant. The female selects a nesting site in a shrub or small tree, often choosing a willow, alder, or spruce. Nests may also be built directly on the ground of the tundra in sheltered locations

The female builds a small cup-shaped nest from grasses, fine twigs, roots, and moss. She lines it with soft materials such as feathers, fur, wool, or plant down to help insulate the eggs and young.
A typical clutch contains several eggs, often pale blue or greenish with dark markings. The female incubates the eggs for about 10 to 12 days. After hatching, the young remain in the nest for roughly another two weeks, although the exact time varies. Both parents contribute to feeding the nestlings. Because the Arctic summer is brief, redpolls must take advantage of the available food and favorable weather to raise their young successfully.

Seeds make up most of the Common Redpoll's diet. Preferring seeds from birch and alders, they will also feed on the seeds from willows, spruces, pines, grasses, and weeds. However, during the breeding season they will feed on insects and spiders to provide additional protein for their growing young.
In natural habitats, redpolls forage in flocks, moving from tree to tree and searching weedy fields for food. When a good food supply is discovered, large numbers may gather in one place.

While during some winters, redpolls remain mostly in Canada and the northern United States, in other years they travel much farther south, sometimes appearing in large numbers across the central United States. Look for redpolls in weedy habitats, check local bird reports, and watch your backyard feeders. This can improve your chances of seeing them during an irruption year.

So, watch for redpolls along roadsides, in open woodlands, and wherever seed-producing trees, shrubs, grasses and weeds are available. Plant native trees and shrubs that support insects and produce seeds. While birch, willow, and alder are important natural food sources in the redpoll's northern range, a variety of native seed-producing plants can benefit them and many other birds in Nebraska.



Nebraska is one of the states that commonly receives northern visitors during the winter months, but the presence of irruptive bird species varies considerably from year to year. Redpolls are considered uncommon, irregular winter visitors in much of the state, and they are generally more likely in northern Nebraska than in the south. But past observations have come from the Panhandle, the Sandhills, and eastern Nebraska especially in irruptive years. With this in mind, if the 2026 winter prediction of irrupting redpolls happens, it may be the winter we enjoy Common Redpolls in our backyards.

When redpolls do move this far south, they begin appearing in Nebraska in late October, although their arrival and abundance vary considerably from year to year. Most sightings occur during the winter months, with birds generally departing by spring. Some have been recorded in Nebraska as late as April.



Their arrival is a reminder that winter bird movements are often influenced by changing food supplies rather than simply by cold temperatures which is why, when northern trees produce fewer seeds, redpolls, crossbills, and other bird species, must travel to find enough food to survive.

For Nebraska birdwatchers, a redpoll sighting is a special seasonal treat. When these little finches appear at a feeder or in a weedy field, they bring a glimpse of the Arctic into our winter landscapes and remind us how closely birds are connected to the changing availability of food and habitat.

So, this winter keep a watch out for Common Redpolls, energetic birds that frequently travel in flocks. Listen for their sharp, buzzy calls and constant chatter as they move through trees or descend on a patch of weeds or at the backyard bird feeders. And when a flock of these little northern finches appears in Nebraska, it offers a reminder that winter birdlife is full of surprises. A bird adapted to the Arctic can suddenly become a welcome guest in our own backyards, connecting Nebraska's winter landscape with the distant forests and tundra of the far north.

WINGTIP: Bird names and classifications have changed in recent years. In 2024, the American Ornithological Society combined the Common Redpoll, Hoary Redpoll, and Lesser Redpoll into one species called the Redpoll. The name Common Redpoll remains familiar in many field guides and older bird records.

For more Nebraska-specific information on Red Polls visit Birds of Nebraska Online at **https://birds.outdoornebraska.gov/** and search **Birds of Nebraska – Redpoll** which includes historical sightings, seasonal dates, and records of major winter irruptions.

Key Causes of Bird Mortality -

Data from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and scientific studies.



- **Cats:** Domestic and feral cats are the number one direct anthropogenic (human-caused) killer of birds. Free-roaming domestic and feral cats kill an estimated 2.4 billion to 3.1 billion birds each year in the United States and Canada alone, Feral cats are responsible for the vast majority of these deaths compared to house cats.
- **Building and Window Collisions:** Crashing into reflective glass, high-rise buildings, and residential windows is the second-leading direct cause, killing roughly 600 million to 1 billion birds annually in the U.S..
- **Vehicle Collisions:** Cars and trucks account for over 200 million bird deaths each year.
- **Poisoning and Pesticides:** Agricultural chemicals, rodenticides, and lead poisoning from ammunition kill an estimated 72 million birds annually.
- **Power Lines and Communication Towers:** Electrical lines, electrocutions, and tall communication structures claim tens of millions of birds combined each year.
- **Habitat Loss:** While harder to quantify as a direct single-moment kill, the overarching loss of natural habitat (such as conversion to agriculture or urban sprawl) remains the single greatest long-term threat to global bird populations.

Common Winter Backyard Sparrows



Song Sparrow – A rich, russet-and-gray bird with bold streaks down its white chest, the Song Sparrow is one of the most familiar North American sparrows. Don't let the bewildering variety of regional differences this bird shows across North America deter you: it's one of the first species you should suspect if you see a streaky sparrow in an open, shrubby, or wet area.



American Tree Sparrow – A plump and long-tailed sparrow that winters in backyards and weedy, snow-covered fields across southern Canada and the northern United States. Hopping up at bent weeds or even beating their wings to dislodge seeds from grass heads, they scratch and peck the ground in small flocks, trading soft, musical twitters. Come snowmelt, these small rusty-capped and smooth-breasted sparrows begin their long migrations to breeding grounds in the tundra of the far North.



Harris' Sparrow – A large sparrow with a white breast and striking along the sides. A brown back has heavy black streaking, white bars on the wings, and a long tail. The head has a black bib, forehead, crown and nape with a pink bill. Rarely found far east or west of the middle of North America, spending the winter in the very central region of the United States. Found in hedgerows, shelter belts, fields, pastures, and weedy patches. Often seen feeding in gardens and backyards.



Dark-eyed Juncos – One of the most common winter members of the sparrow family, has a slate gray body and hood with a pure white belly. White outer tail feathers are most visible in flight. Found in undergrowth of open woodlands, roadsides, and shrubs. Often seen in backyards and around bird feeders. Many call this bird the "snow bird" as it precedes the first snows of the season.



White-crowned Sparrow - Nebraska acts as a crossroads for different regional variations of the white-crowned sparrow with a vast majority of the birds migrating through or wintering in the state. They have distinct, bold, black-and-white stripes on its head, contrasting with a clean, pearly-gray breast and face. Look for them scratching for seeds under feeders.



White-throated Sparrow - They are best recognized by a crisp, snow-white throat patch and bright yellow lores (the small spot between the eyes and the beak) The male's song is a clear, haunting, whistled melody traditionally mnemonically described as ***"Oh-sweet-Canada, Canada, Canada"*** or ***"Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody"***. In Nebraska, the white-throated sparrow is primarily known as a common, regular migratory traveler, though a small number stay to spend the winter.

Wingtips: Ground feeders with Nutra safflower seed and white Proso millet are excellent for attracting native sparrows and other ground foraging birds. You may add a little cracked corn to the mix unless squirrels are a big problem. If you see a small brown bird scratching the ground with their feet to turn up seeds, it's a native sparrow and deserves a closer look. House sparrows use their bill to sweep the ground..

Dave's November Bird Chatter

This is a wonderful time of year to get outdoors before more frigid weather arrives. Take a field guide and a pair of binoculars and enjoy the birds you see. Its great fun to keep track of the number of birds you can observe taking a short walk or drive. Take a longer walk down a trail or longer drive to a wildlife refuge. You may be surprised at what you discover during the fall bird migration.



The ducks and geese are really getting restless this month, and soon they will be heading toward their winter ranges in the Southern States. Some will remain if they locate open water. The last to fly over heading south are the long lines of very vocal Snow Geese. When we see them it's a sign the fall bird migration is coming to an end for 2026. The winter cold and snow is usually on the heels of these high-flying birds.

Here in Lancaster County, and southern Saunders County, numerous area creeks rarely freeze up solid. Salt Creek, Haines Branch, Oak Creek and Little Salt Creek in Lancaster County remain open in places during the winter due to the high salinity of the water. Several small tributaries into Salt Creek remain open as they pass through the salt marshes. These saline waters only occur on the west side of Salt Creek.

On the east side plenty of fresh water streams flow into Salt Creek. These riparian areas harbor an abundance of birds as well. Steven's Creek, Antelope Creek, Dead Man's Run, and Beale's Slough are the major tributaries to Salt Creek. Several of these creeks have trails that run adjacent to them or cross them several times. This makes short bird walks possible. The Salt Creek watershed lakes, Wagon Train, Stagecoach, Branched Oak, and several others, also support many birds until the water freezes over for the winter.

Seasonal changes usher many birds into and through Nebraska. With 450 bird species on Nebraska's bird checklist, it makes the state one of the best birding regions on the North American Continent. Each season brings a different variety of birds including vagrants and rare species.



Song Sparrow in Winter

We are waiting to start receiving reports of winter birds from the north at the bird feeders. Several reports of Junco's have come in and I'm sure many more will follow. Native sparrows will soon be appearing scratching the ground in the leaves and under the feeders to turn up seeds. Keep your eyes open for these exciting little birds. Remember, if you see a small brown bird scratching the ground with their feet, these are native sparrows and worth the effort to identify.

As the cold fronts begin pushing south out of Canada it will drive many more northern birds into our area where they will spend the winter. Red Polls, Evening Grosbeaks, Crossbills, Pine siskin and Purple Finch to name a few. No one knows what bird may drop by their backyard. It could be a Snow Bunting or a Brown Creeper so be observant.

It often seems as though it is the casual person feeding birds who notices an unusual bird that appears in their yard. The main thing is if you do see a bird show up that is not one of the common birds that visit your bird feeders during the winter, or any time of the year, try to identify it. If you can't, contact the Wild Bird Habitat Store or someone who can help. Most of the really rare birds are found in this manner. Download Merlin, a free bird ID APP from the Cornell Bird Lab.

Keep the water in the bird bath open and fresh. Remember, birds have numerous food sources staked out for the winter. Birds don't rely on any one food source. But water can be a resource that is difficult to locate in freezing temperatures. If you do not have water available for birds in the winter, maybe this would be a good year to add it to your bird feeding program.



WINGTIP: If you use a heater in your bird bath during the winter now is the time to clean it up and make certain it is in working order. Do the freezer test. Place your heater in the freezer for twenty minutes. This will activate the thermostat. Remove it from the freezer and plug it in. It should begin to warm up. Bird bath de-icers either work or not. If they only warm up slightly then they may need scale and other deposits cleaned off. This can be accomplished by mixing vinegar with water then soaking the de-icer and scrubbing with a stiff brush to remove deposits.



Some people reported a lack of birds over the past few weeks but are now beginning to return to the feeders, and many more will join them. In September an abundance of natural foods are available and the birds will take advantage of those foods knowing it won't last. Although they have been busy staking out numerous natural food plots for winter, they know where the bird feeders are and will use them as a supplemental food source. This is why we recommend keeping your feeders filled during periods where you may not see many birds. Birds are in transition preparing to move into the winter season. And as more northern birds return for the winter, and the temperatures continue to slide toward zero, I guarantee the activity at the bird feeders will pickup dramatically. But keep in mind, backyard bird feeders only account for about 30% of a bird's overall diet.

WINGTIP: Birds can burn up 50% of their energy in a day foraging for food. So, every seed they eat must meet their nutritional requirements. They are selective feeders and know which seeds are good and which are not. All black oil sunflower seed is not the same. The quality of the premium black oil sunflower seed sold at the Wild Bird Habitat Stores is preferred by more birds providing the right amount of protein, fat, and fiber. Black oil sunflower might all look the same, but the birds know the difference from the discounted brands.



Will we have snow before Wild Bird Habitat's December newsletter is on the shelf? Hard to say, but winter is fast approaching. Keep the suet out as it provides a good source of protein and fat for woodpeckers and nuthatches.

More Carolina Wrens are reported every year opting to spend the winter in more northern states as previous years. Carolina Wrens are one of only a few birds that will sing during the winter while most birds are silent. This bird has the typical turned up tail as do all wrens. Along with the distinctive tail, look for the white eyebrow which makes identification fairly easy. They too find the suet feeder, Nutra safflower, and shelled peanuts an attractive source of high energy protein during the cold winter months.



Carolina Wren

Keep the feeders filled. Maybe add a new style of bird feeder this year to attract a larger variety of birds. Keep the binoculars handy and a good field guide close by. If you want to move your bird feeders so they are more visible from inside the house, now is a good time to do so. If you need any hardware, Wild Bird Habitat has a variety of hooks, poles, and hangers and plenty of good information on installation. We hope everyone has an exciting experience during the last month of bird migration.

KEEP WILDERNESS PARK WILD - *Donate today to help expand Wilderness Park*

The Friends of Wilderness Park have partnered with the City of Lincoln and the Solidago Conservancy to add 50 acres to the park to expand bird habitat, create more nature exploration, and recreational adventures



Wilderness Park is Lincoln's largest public park, a seven-mile linear, 1472-acre woodland nestled just west of the Jamaican North trail along Salt Creek from Van Dorn to Saltillo Road. The park features 31 miles of hiking, cycling, and horse trails within its naturally wooded area.

For mor information visit: friendsofwildernesspark.org and click on Donate

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Fun Wild Turkey Facts



- Mature turkeys have 3,500 or so feathers. The Apache Indians considered the turkey timid and wouldn't eat it or use its feathers on their arrows.
- Turkeys originated in North and Central America, and evidence indicates that they have been around for over 10 million years.
- In Mexico, the turkey was considered a sacrificial bird.
- Only male turkeys (toms) gobble. Females (hens) make a clicking noise. The gobble is a seasonal call during the spring and fall. Hens are attracted for mating when a tom gobbles. Wild toms love to gobble when they hear loud sounds or settle in for the night.
- During the day turkeys forage for acorns, seeds, insects and berries.
- Wild turkeys have excellent vision during the day but not at night.
- Juvenile turkeys are called "jakes".
- Wild turkeys roost in high trees at night to avoid predation.
- Wild turkeys make short flights. Domestic turkeys cannot fly.
- Turkeys can be so aggressive if they were the size of humans, there may not be as many humans.

Multiple studies have shown observing nature just 15 minutes a day can enhance one's well-being relieving stress, anxiety, and help with depression for all ages. And feeding birds is an easy way to observe and connect with nature.



Studies have also shown that feeding birds benefits the birds during the winter months, spring nesting, during every season.

So this Christmas consider a gift of a backyard bird feeder. It provides a positive outcome for birds and people alike.

Wild Bird Habitat Stores

For 34 years Lincoln's backyard bird feeding experts have providied
Sales, Service, & Information
to make your backyard bird feeding experience a success. Guaranteed!

When you shop at Wild Bird Habitat you are supporting the conservation of birds and wildlife, environmental education, and outdoor birding recreation

We thank you for your support