

Wild Bird Habitat Store

January 2022 Newsletter

Winter has set in across the Great Plains

South Lincoln

In the Alamo Plaza
56th & Hwy 2
Lincoln, NE 68516
(402) 420-2553

North Lincoln

4900 Dudley St
2 BLKS South of Holdrege
Lincoln, NE 68504
(402) 464-4055

Omaha

Harrison Village Mall
168th & Harrison
Millard, NE 68136
(402) 504-4450

www.wildbirdhabitatstore.com



We'd like to thank all our customers and those who voted for The Wild Bird Habitat Stores as the best backyard bird feeding retailer in Lincoln and the surrounding region.



January Bird Notes:

- Get ready now for the 13th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Details inside.
- Share watching birds at the feeders with your kids, family, friends and guests.
- Continue to watch your feeders for new winter birds..
- Fresh, open water is extremely important for birds during cold weather.
- Provide grit for your feathered guests when snow and ice cover the ground.
- Finch and Pine Siskin's appetite for thistle seed will continue to increase.
- Suet and peanuts are excellent winter foods for woodpeckers and others.
- You can make the difference in the survival of many of our feeder birds.
- Consider a small bird feeder outside your office window or place of business.

**Wishing Everyone
Good Birding
In 2022**



Red-headed Woodpecker

The Red-headed Woodpecker is one of the most striking birds of the woodpecker family. They sport a bright crimson head with feathers so fine it has the appearance of velour. The back is black with the upper wing and balance pure white. Juvenile birds however are difficult to identify. The head and upper back are often a dark brown, making identification somewhat tricky at times. It is one of the more aggressive members of the woodpecker family, thus if they are attracted to your feeders they may appear to be a bit aggressive to other woodpeckers.

The populations of this beautiful bird have been in an alarming decline. Enough so they have been listed by Audubon as a species of concern. There may be several reasons. The most common is the same problem all cavity nesting birds face, loss of habitat. Woodpeckers are primary cavity nesting birds, excavating a new nest site each year. The removal of trees, especially dead trees, for fire wood, development, and other human activities has had a profound impact on many of these birds.



Another threat is the European Starling. Starlings will gang up on a nesting pair of woodpeckers, attempting to kill them and drive them off. It is estimated that Red-bellied Woodpeckers alone lose half their nests to Starlings. Once the Starlings have succeeded in confiscating the nest cavity, a squabble ensues as to which pair will take it over. It usually goes to the most dominant pair. Finally, the Red-headed Woodpeckers reckless desire to feed on easily accessible worms and caterpillars crawling across highways and roads often lands a fatal blow. No other bird seems to be so oblivious to a speeding automobile than the Red-headed Woodpecker. Great numbers are killed each year by cars.

The movement of this bird during the winter months depends on the supply of acorns. Northern birds may migrate to the southern parts of their range, with most having left for winter quarters by late October. In the south these birds are often permanent residents. They prefer to winter over in forests and woodlands where oak trees are present. During lean years it may be hard to find even a few of them.



Red-headed Woodpeckers are the most omnivorous of the woodpeckers. Besides acorns they will readily feed on corn, sunflower seed, peanuts, fruits and berries. Two thirds of their diet is made up of plant matter. They also feed on a variety of insects, larvae, and other opportune protein sources such as suets. Along with their cousin, the Lewis's Woodpecker found in western regions, they will hawk insects out of the air in flight.

Wingtip: Woodpeckers will stiffen their tail to provide leverage when drilling holes, drumming, and feeding.

The Red-headed Woodpecker's breeding habitat is open country across southern Canada the eastern United States and Central Great Plains. They arrived on the breeding range by late April, with nesting activities starting in May. As with all woodpeckers, they prefer to excavate their nest in a dead tree or dead branch on a tree. These are referred to as snags. Unlike some of the other woodpeckers, the Red-headed prefers this over a man-made nesting box. Once the nest hole has been completed, the female will lay a clutch of about 5 white eggs in the nest, which is located from eight feet to eighty feet above the ground. The male will share in the duties of incubation which lasts about two weeks. Once the young have hatched, both the male and female will assume the responsibilities of feeding until they fledge which can take up to four weeks. If a second clutch of eggs is produced the adults may drive the older siblings off in order to raise the new family.

The future of the Red-headed Woodpecker remains uncertain. In Canada they are listed as a vulnerable species. In the United States they are listed as near threatened. The species has declined in numbers due to habitat loss caused by harvesting of snags, agricultural development, channeling of rivers, a decline in farming resulting to regeneration of eastern forests, monoculture crops, the loss of small orchards, and treatment of telephone poles with creosote.

Wingtip: Woodpeckers, as with other cavity nesting birds, will use old nest cavities and nest boxes as a winter roost to retreat from harsh weather. However they will excavate a new nest cavity every spring in a dead tree or branch. They will never excavate a cavity in a green tree.

Red-headed Woodpecker Fun Facts

- The Red-headed Woodpecker is one of only four woodpeckers known to store food. They will cache away nuts and seed. They are the only woodpecker known to cover their cache to hide it from view of others. They will also hide insects in cracks of tree bark, in wooden fence posts, even under shingles on roofs. They will regularly hide live grasshoppers, wedging them into crevices so tight they cannot escape.
- Red-headed Woodpeckers will attack and drive other birds out of their territory. They will go as far as to remove the eggs from the nests of other bird species, destroying nests, or puncturing eggs.
- The Red-headed Woodpecker benefits from diseases that attack trees. One such disease, Dutch Elm, killed many trees providing abundant nesting sites.



Wingtip: Secondary cavity nesting birds, Chickadees, Bluebirds, Wrens, Screech Owls, Nuthatches, to name a few, rely on old woodpecker holes to build their nests. These birds also become susceptible to parasitism by the European Starling. Further, the lack of snags that provide woodpecker nest sites impact secondary cavity nesting birds.

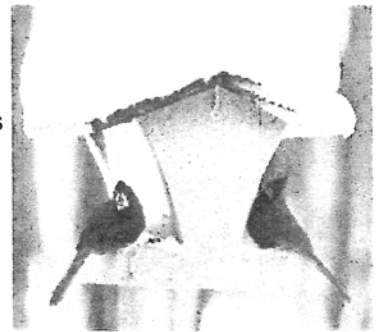
Dave's January Bird Chatter

The Wild Bird Habitat Stores would like to thank all those individuals and families that are providing for our birds. Although it was a mild December in 2021, we have a lot of winter left for 2022 and it will undoubtedly feel more like winter soon. When those cold periods do arrive it takes a lot of energy for birds to keep warm. On the Great Plains wind-chills to plummet more than -30 degrees in winter and the energy birds require to keep warm during the night is only by spending the day -light hours foraging for food. And with shorter days during the winter months every opportunity spent foraging is crucial for a bird's survival.

In an instant natural foods that birds rely on can become buried under feet of snow. And those icy temperatures can freeze any water outdoors that is essential for survival. As for shelter, most wildlife can find a burrow, den, or some form of escape from the winter winds. But birds are left to perch out in the open. They endure the most extreme weather mother nature has to offer.

An extended period of research and observation by biologists during a harsh winter in upper Michigan studies showed that birds do not become reliant on bird feeders. That if the bird feeders were removed in mid-winter, the survival rate was equal to birds that never had access to feeders. In fact additional studies revealed that when birds did have supplemental foods available at bird feeders throughout the winter months, their survival rates were higher. But of all the extremes nature throws at them it is loss of habitat that remains the number one cause of declining bird species and bird populations. That loss of habitat has been, and continues to be, caused by the expansion of human activity.

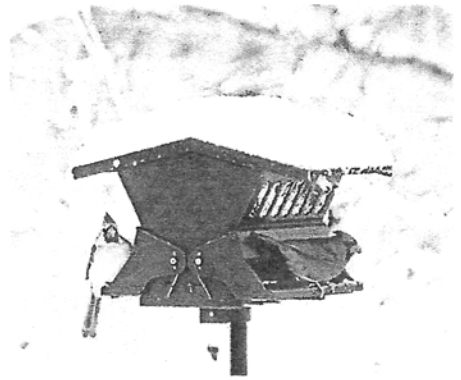
In the last 40 years bird populations have declined by more than 3 billion birds. And with the climate warming from human activity, the loss of bird habitat is rapidly accelerating far faster than what had been predicted just 10 years ago. This has led to an unprecedented decline in current bird populations.



Birds have been around for millions of years. They are masters of survival. Many may perish during an extremely harsh winter, but the majority will persist and populations will recover. Birds have always been one of the most resilient and adaptive of our wildlife. They have an intelligence that continues to amaze us, and the biologists that study them. But as climate changes and human activity increases and expands it has put an extreme amount of pressure on birds.

With the unusual weather patterns that occur through fall and winter, it makes the Great Backyard Bird Count more important than ever. This year the free count is from February 18 to 21 and we encourage everyone to participate. The data collected by "citizen scientists" provides valuable information on the movements of birds during winter. Birds are very dynamic and constantly on the move looking for new food resources as others become depleted. This is a good reason to keep observant, looking for unusual birds at your feeders. Many rare bird sightings are reported by backyard bird watchers. Those irruptive species, northern birds that drift south in winter looking for food, can create quite a bit of excitement when they appear.

When heavy snows and ice pack covers vast majorities of natural foods, backyard bird feeders can become a source of supplemental foods for our birds. This might be a good time to add another type of bird feeder to your existing backyard bird feeding program. Birds have specific feeding habits. Some will only feed on the ground. This is where ground bird feeders work well. It keeps seed off the ground and attracts Juncos, native sparrows, doves, and many others. Cardinals prefer a large perching area to forage on, such as a hopper bird feeder or a platform feeder. The more types of bird feeders you have will attract a larger variety of birds. And just as important are the types of wild bird feeds offered in various feeders. This will also make a difference in the kinds of birds you attract. Consult our "Backyard Bird Feeding Basics" handout available at the Wild Bird Habitat Store, or "Backyard Bird Feeding 101" on-line at wildbirdhabitatstore.com. Or just ask our staff the next time you stop by any Wild Bird Habitat Store about the types of bird feeds available.

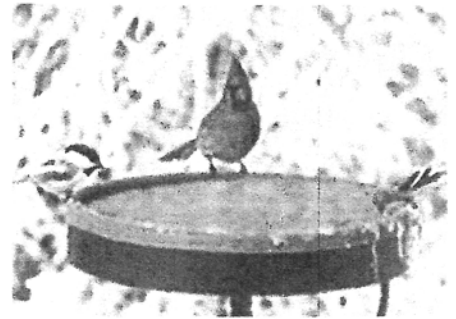


Another item that is essential for birds is grit; a fine gravel, coarse sand, or crushed rock, to aid in digestion. Since birds do not have teeth to chew their food they need some form of grit to grind the food. The grit will sit in their crop where seeds are kept helping to grind the seeds and other foods they consume preparing the food for digestion. Coarse sand or fine gravel works well. That is why you will often find Quail and Pheasant, as well as many song birds, near gravel roads in rural areas. At Wild Bird Habitat we carry a "granite grit" also call "chic-grit" that is specially ground for birds and is better than sand. The grit can be mixed in with the bird feed or placed out separate from the food in any accessible location. A little grit goes a long way.



Granite grit for your birds - available at the Wild Bird Habitat Stores

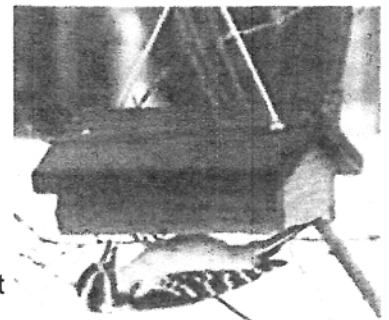
Another key resource required for the survival of birds is water. Open fresh water can become rare during cold weather. Birds can fly in search of water. They could eat snow. But both these activities lower their body temperatures using up valuable energy which must be replaced by foraging for additional foods to survive through the cold night. While birds may have multiple food sources to wander around to, fresh open water can be hard to find. We have a large assortment of heated bird baths, or bird bath heaters for your existing bird bath. There is still a lot of winter left when water will be scarce. Providing fresh unfrozen water during the winter months can attract more birds than just food alone.



American Goldfinches should become plentiful with the arrival of the cold and snow. Maybe we'll have a large number of Pine Siskin arriving. We always get reports of Siskins about. But if food availability is good in the north country we might not see a lot of Pine Siskin. You just never know. Numerous Goldfinch arrive at my feeders just prior to the 2021 Thanksgiving as temperatures dropped. Since then they have been a bit more sporadic. With the lack of heavy snow cover so far there is still plenty of natural foods available for them. Usually, folks in the rural country side often do not see them flocking to thistle feeders until late December

The Goldfinches we have now are primarily the northern population as many of our resident Goldfinch drift south in the late fall. They will return the first of March, doubling the numbers of finch we enjoy. By then the males will begin to show their bright "canary" yellow breeding plumage. The northern birds will remain till early May when they will follow the dandelion bloom back to their nesting territory, leaving us with our summer resident Goldfinch populations.

As always, suet will be a prime target for woodpeckers. I am often asked if suet will get rancid and spoil. Raw suet, or beef fat, from the butcher can spoil, especially in warmer weather. It is best to use commercially rendered suet found in Wild Bird Habitat's suet cakes, plugs, and balls. The beef fat is rendered by boiling. This kills any bacteria that could otherwise form. Some people have seen Carolina Wrens, nuthatches, Brown Creepers, and Chickadees at their suet feeders along with a variety of woodpeckers. All these birds will continue to enjoy the high energy of suet through the winter months. But it is during the nesting season that woodpeckers will even consume more suet. This makes suet a great year round product.

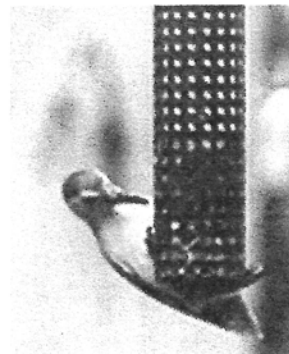


There is a lot of winter weather left and at times it may be cold or inconvenient to go out to fill the bird feeders. But the benefits to birds and the joy they bring us makes it all worth while when we are back inside our warm homes watching them. It's a blessing we can help them in the short term. But as a people we need to assure their habitats are protected so future generations will be able to enjoy the birds as well.

February of 2021 will be a cold month to remember. But we are just into winter and we no doubt will see many frigid days before retreating into spring. Even if we have a late winter thaw, most the natural foods that were available for birds will have been consumed or destroyed. So keep your bird feeders filled, enjoy the Great Backyard Bird Count, and keep an eye out for any new birds showing up. Feel free to give us a call at Wild Bird Habitat and let us know. Backyard bird feeding! It's beneficial for the birds, and enjoyable for us. We hope everyone has a great new year of birding in 2022. Good birding to you all.

The Allure of Peanuts

Peanuts are a great source of fat for birds. After all, it's the fat content of the seeds birds consume that provides the warmth and energy they need during the long cold winter. Red-bellied Woodpeckers almost prefer peanuts over suet. It is the oils in the nuts they eat that provide that valuable fat. This is why quality wild bird feeds are so attractive to the birds. They can identify which seeds will meet their needs. That's why the food we put in our bird feeders should be high in oil content. This is also the reason inferior wild bird seed mixes with wheat, Milo, red-millet and "assorted grain products" create so much uneaten waste on the ground and attract fewer birds.



Is it a Cooper's Hawk or Sharp-shinned Hawk

The Cooper's hawk is considerably larger, 14" to 18" with a wingspan of up to 35", the Sharp-shinned Hawk smaller averaging 9" to 13" with a wingspan that can approach 22". As with most raptors the females are the larger of the two genders. In fact a large female Sharp-shinned hawk can appear to be the same size as a male Cooper's hawk.

In order to make a positive identification between these two hawks that are common backyard visitors you must look at the more identifying features know as field marks. One of the most distinguishing features is the tail. The end of a Sharp-shinned hawk's tail is square and has a thin white tip. The outer feathers are slightly longer. The Cooper's hawk on the other hand has a more rounded tail with a larger white tip.



Cooper's Hawk

Another significant clue is the dark grey coloration on the top of the head of Sharp-shinned Hawk that extending down the back of the neck joining the dark coloration on its back. The Cooper's hawk has more of a dark grey "cap". The dark grey coloration on the top of the head is interrupted by lighter feathers on the back of the neck, so that the bird looks like it has a cap of grey. One way to remember this is that "*a Coop has a cap.*" Also look at the legs. The Sharp-shinned hawk has thin pencil like legs while the Cooper's legs are thick.



Sharp-shinned
Hawk

Wingtip: We often have people believing they have a Peregrine Falcon in their yard when it's either a Cooper's Hawk or a Sharp-shin Hawk. The Peregrine has a mottled chest much like these two woodland hawks, but it is grey in color. The chest of the Cooper or Sharp-shin is auburn to brown. That may be what confuses some folks the most.



24th Annual *Great Backyard Bird Count*

February 18 - 21, 2022

birdcount.org



Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) was the **first online citizen-science project** (also referred to as community science) to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is **FREE, FUN, and EASY!** An event that **engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations.**

Watch for more information from Nebraska's Wild Bird Habitat Stores

The New Year brings our first snow -

As I write this newsletter for the first of January, 2022, I sit and wait for the impending storm. Today it's foggy and dressily ahead of Saturday, January 1st, when the heavy snows arrive with -30 degree windchills ushering it in. This will not doubt be a challenging few days for birds.

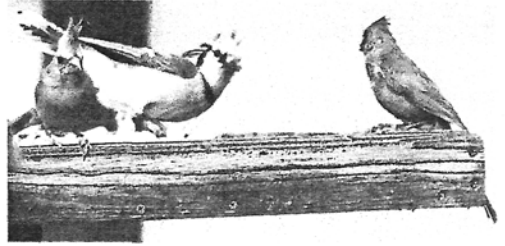
Winter is one of the reasons we work to educate folks on the benefits of backyard bird feeding. Not only is it providing for the birds at moment when it's all about survival, but watching those birds at the feeders can relieve cabin fever. Watching birds is relaxing, relieves stress, and is entertaining for the whole family. A little bit of nature to comfort us.

As we move into January, hawks and eagles will be on the move. They are the first to begin the trek back to their previous years nest if it survived the winter. Eagles will do a little remodeling and sprucing up when they arrive at the nest. Adding to the structure each year, an eagle's nest can grow to weigh a ton or more. Our resident Bald Eagles across much of Nebraska have remained with the lack of lakes icing over so far. Many will remain if they can locate open patches of water when the lakes do ice over or streams and creeks since they don't totally freeze up. Bald Eagles around the Lincoln area have become somewhat common almost all year especially as Salt Creek is. Eagle conservation and education has been a success story helping to move the eagle from endangered to threatened as the population increased.

Katie, Linda, Dave, and all our staff at the Wild Bird Habitat Stores have enjoyed our customers over the past 28 years, and we hope the interest in birds continues to grow in 2022.

Some common myths and misconceptions about feeding birds

A recent article once again raised the issue of birds becoming dependent on backyard bird feeders especially during the winter months. Birds do not rely on any one single food source. Their ability to forage for a variety of foods under various conditions along with the uncanny ability to adapt to changes has proven to be a successful survival instinct over millions of years. What birds cannot adapt to is the loss of habitat which is the number one cause for the rapidly declining populations of many bird species which is not a myth but a fact. Here are some common myths associated with backyard bird feeding:



Myth: Birds become dependent on bird feeders.

Fact: While the same birds may regularly visit feeders as part of their daily foraging, studies have shown that wild birds only get an average of 30 percent of their food from feeders. There are many wild food sources that birds prefer and while they will visit feeders out of convenience, they are well able to find other sources of food if feeders are unavailable. Feeders may become more critical during harsh winters, but birds will not starve if the feeders aren't filled. We do however recommend during these extreme weather events you keep your bird feeders filled as snow and ice may cover up much of the natural foods for a period of time.

Myth: If birds eat uncooked rice, it can swell up in their throats or stomachs and kill them.

Fact: Plenty of birds eat uncooked rice in the wild. Bobolinks, sometimes called "rice birds," are a good example. While rice is okay for birds, many wedding parties now throw bird seed instead.

Myth: Birds can choke on peanut butter.

Fact: There is no documented evidence for this. However, mixing peanut butter with grit or cornmeal will break up the stickiness if you are concerned.

Myth: Birds' feet can stick to metal perches.

Fact: This is not likely. A bird's legs and feet are made up mostly of tough tendons that have little blood flow during cold weather. However, we've heard rumors of feet sticking to perches: if you observe this unfortunate circumstance, please take a picture and send it to Project Feeder Watch.

Myth: Feeding Birds in the Fall Keeps Them from Migrating

Fact: Many inexperienced birders assume that as long as there is food available, the birds will be there, and that feeding them will interfere with the birds' migration. While some bird species, such as American robins and waxwings, are nomadic with relation to their food sources, birds that migrate depend on the weather, daylight and their own genetic instincts to begin migration. Instead of keeping birds from migrating, available feeders actually give them a much needed energy boost to help them survive their long journeys.

Myth: You Don't Need to Feed Birds in the summer

Fact: While there are more natural food sources available during the summer months, including flowers, insects, fruits and natural seeds, these are the same months when parent birds are overworked trying to provide for hungry broods and growing nestlings. Supplemental food from feeders is an easy and convenient resource for many summer birds, particularly at a time when there are more birds around to compete for the same food sources. By feeding the birds in the summer, you'll enjoy many more species in your backyard and will "teach" young birds where to return the following year for a reliable food source.