

THE BACKYARD NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2024

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK

The Black-headed Grosbeak is mainly found in central British Columbia, though in the past 70 years it has expanded its range throughout BC.

They usually begin to arrive on Vancouver Island around the beginning of May and stick around until August, when they migrate south.

Black-headed Grosbeaks are about 7 or 8 inches in length with a pale, conical bill. Their large, strong bill allows them to easily open the shells on their preferred seeds and is what gives them the name Grosbeak.

Male Grosbeaks have a black head and rusty-orange body. The wings and tail are also black with white markings. Females are brown and streaky with a white crest above their eye and a buffy to orange unstreaked chest. Similar coloured birds include Orioles and the Varied Thrush, though Orioles are not found here.

The song of the Black-headed Grosbeak is similar to that of the American Robin; a series of warbled phrases. It is also very close to the song of the Rose Grosbeak seen in the east.

Black-headed Grosbeaks tend to build their nests in deciduous trees and shrubs. The cup shaped nest is built bulky and loose, with twigs and grasses lined with finer material. They lay 3 to 4 blue-green eggs that have brown markings, and have only a single brood in a year. The eggs incubate for 14 days and fledge another 14 days after hatching.



J. Morrison

Black-headed Grosbeaks start nesting at the end of May or beginning of June. Once the young start flying, they almost immediately start their migration.

Black-headed Grosbeaks eat a variety of things including insects, berries, fruits, and seeds.

When visiting backyards they enjoy black oil sunflower seed and can be found sitting on open tray feeders. They will also go for hulled sunflower seeds and peanuts when available.

THE CALIFORNIA QUAIL

MALE QUAIL (LEFT) AND FEMALE QUAIL (RIGHT)

THE MALE CALIFORNIA QUAIL is a plump game bird with short legs and a comma shaped crest. They have a black-and-white scaled pattern on their belly and a chestnut patch on the chest. The male also has a black face outlined in bright white, and a chestnut cap.



MALE CALIFORNIA QUAIL
—R. HOCKEN

FEMALE QUAIL are a brownish gray on their neck and face, with a smaller comma shaped crest. They also have the same scaled belly pattern but lack the male's bold facial markings.



FEMALE CALIFORNIA QUAIL
—R. HOCKEN

Young California Quail are running after the adults within a day of hatching. Adults will group together and parent their broods collectively. Adult Quail will fake broken wings to lure predators away from their young.

COMMON NIGHTHAWKS

Look to the sky to catch a Common Nighthawk because you likely won't spot one in your backyard.

The Common Nighthawk is an aerial artist that, despite the name, is not a part of the hawk family. Instead, the Nighthawk is a member of the Nightjar family, alongside the common (but not locally) Whip-poor-will. When in flight, the Common Nighthawk's silhouette resembles that of a falcon with their sharply pointed wings.

Larger than the swallows, the Common Nighthawk is around nine inches in length with pointed wings. They are easily distinguishable from below due to the distinctive white wingbars across their primary feathers.

Nighthawks have a whitish body with darker bars. Males have a white patch on the throat and white bar on the tail, and females have a buffy patch with no tail bar. Their upper body is grayish brown with some white markings.

A quick way to identify these birds is their raspy *peeant* call. You can also listen for the *boom* of the male's dive as he flexes his wings during courtship or while diving at intruders.

Similar to swallows, the Common Nighthawk feeds on the wing. If you manage to spot one, watch their aerial acrobatics as they twist and turn to catch flying insects. They are more commonly spotted feeding at dusk when the insects are out in force, but can be seen day or night if you're lucky.

Common Nighthawks usually feed in small groups, though larger ones have been spotted. They also drink as they fly, swooping down to scoop water instead of perching for a drink.

The Common Nighthawk is a migratory species common to most areas of North America, though with the rise of pesticide usage their numbers are dwindling.



Faulkner

Vanguard Bluetooth Smartphone Adaptor



Attach the smartphone adaptor to almost any scope or set of binoculars for excellent photo and video opportunities. Comes with a Bluetooth remote for easy image capture.

\$89.95



BIRDS IN THE GARDEN

Those berries you've been eagerly watching have other admirers in your backyard: birds. For many birds that don't enjoy seeds, your garden's assortment of fruits and plant shoots can look quite tasty and available.

There are plenty of options to help prevent these birds from devouring all your hard work. Birds are stubborn but aren't prone to sticking around hostile environments. If you are able to make the area unappealing, they usually choose to move on to better locations. If you have a particularly bad or reoccurring problem, using multiple deterrents can have better results than just one.

The downside of bird deterrents is that you can't pick and choose which birds are deterred. Most deterrents will deter all birds from an area, not just a few troublemakers.

When choosing the most effective deterrents, there are two basic categories: visual and physical. Visual deterrents work to spook birds away from an area, while physical deterrents are some kind of barrier that prevents the birds from accessing a location.



Visual devices are a simple option that works against a wide variety of birds. For a visual device to be effective, it does have to move. Whether that's changing the location of your plastic owl every day or hanging something reflective that blows in the wind, it can't be still.

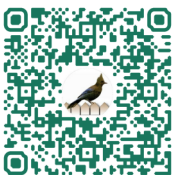
When the visual deterrent is static for too long, the birds stop registering it as a threat. Things that don't move are simply objects to them and will be ignored. Bird scare tape, or even something like tinfoil pie plates hung on a string can deter birds. It twists, turns, and glitters in the wind in unpredictable ways that make birds unwilling to approach.

Using physical barriers can also keep birds out of a set area. Building a frame and draping 1/4" mesh bird netting or chicken wire with small holes across it can keep birds from accessing your garden space.

If you've got crows or other birds that always go after your strawberries, try painting some rocks to look like strawberries and leave them in your garden before the strawberries ripen. When the birds try to peck at the berries, they instead hit rocks and often are unwilling to test it when the actual berries come out.



HUMMINGBIRD BEE REPELLENT



Dissuade bees, wasps, hornets, other stinging insects, and ants from getting into your hummingbird feeder. Lightly spray around feeding ports and reapply after every wash.

\$22.99 ea.



What kind of duck robs banks?

Safe Quackers!



FEEDING SUET



J. Morrison

CHOOSING SUET

When choosing a suet, look for those with little to no bird seed made with real beef kidney suet. Beef kidney suet is fat from the kidneys of cattle and sheep and it's a high density, high energy food source for the birds that has a higher melting point than other available options.

Some suet will use tallow instead, which is a softer fat with fewer calories for the birds. Tallow is more likely to dissolve and melt in rain or heat and contains less energy for your backyard birds, making it less attractive an option.

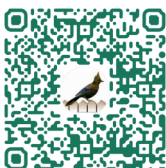
Also make sure to avoid suet with lots of bird seed. While bird seed is a great source of nutrition for birds, what they are looking for in suet is calories and energy. Suet with plenty of bird seed is more likely to be ignored and wasted by backyard birds.

The most popular suet include beef kidney suet as a base, with peanuts, peanut butter, and insects for their high protein value.

Suet Palace Feeder

Resist the Eastern Gray Squirrels and European Starlings while still allowing woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, bushtits, and other suet eating birds access.

\$69.99 EA.



Suet is an excellent addition to backyard feeding stations year round. It may be thought of as simply a winter addition, but birds will enjoy suet no matter the time of year.

Suet is a great food source for a variety of birds. Woodpeckers, bushtits, chickadees, and nuthatches are common suet eating birds. Some less common but equally enjoyable visitors include Bewick's Wrens, Townsend's Warblers, and Orange-crowned Warblers.

Some Western Tanagers and sparrows are also learning to hang off suet feeders for this high energy treat, or they also enjoy it grated into a tray feeder.

Another unfortunate suet enjoyer is the European Starlings. As an opportunist, the starling feeds on whatever it can find and often you'll notice a small flock decimate your suet in a day.

To help deter starlings, using an upside down suet feeder or turning your existing suet feeder to only allow access from the bottom is the simplest way.

Woodpeckers, bushtits, chickadees, and nuthatches will naturally hang upside down to feed while starlings tend to have more difficulty doing so. It may not eliminate your starling problem but it certainly slows them down!

A small starter cage can be a great start though they aren't ideal for all birds. Smaller birds such as chickadees and bushtits have no problem with the smaller cages, but the larger woodpeckers can have more difficulty using them.

Choosing a suet feeder with a tail prop or placing it right up against a tree trunk can encourage woodpeckers like the Northern Flicker or Pileated to use your suet feeder and stick around longer.

Suet feeders in cages can work to deter unwanted visitors but depending on the style can also keep wanted birds out.

When choosing a suet feeder, think about which birds you are wanting to attract, and which you don't.



OUTWITTING BACKYARD CRITTERS

To deter unwanted backyard critters, first figure out what they are going for, how they found it, and how they are getting it. Once you know you can work on making it less accessible to them, or remove the temptation altogether.

Most animals are only willing to go so far for a snack, and if you make it more trouble than it's worth to them they will usually move on to easier sources.

First, check under your bird feeder. Often four-legged guests find the spilled seed on the ground and realize the source is nearby. By keeping the ground clean you can stop this issue before it gets started. Using less seed in your feeders, hanging seed catching trays underneath, or switching to a mess-less seed like hulled sunflower are excellent ways to keep the ground clean and critter-free.

If they've already discovered your feeder, it's time to make it hard to get to. Baffles can be hung above or below your feeder, depending on how your furry friend is accessing the bird seed. When using a baffle, make sure there is nothing close by for the squirrel to jump sideways from.

When trying to outwit raccoons, switching from a hook to a rope or a chain can stop them from simply pulling the feeder down entirely. If you've ever had a suet feeder disappear, it could have been a raccoon.

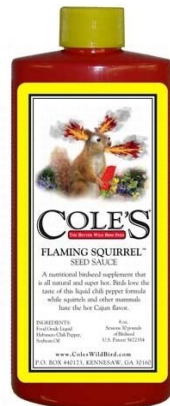
If you aren't able to hang your feeder from a tree and keep it rodent free, using a freestanding shepherd hook is the way to go.

The shepherd hook should be placed somewhere open enough that nothing can climb a nearby tree and get onto your feeder.

Sometimes having it on a shepherd hook alone can solve your critter problems. If it doesn't, you can add a baffle onto your pole to stop them from climbing up.

We also recommend storing your bird seed somewhere cool and dry, inside an airtight container. Preferably metal, if you can, to stop it from being chewed into by a determined furry visitor.

Unfortunately, none of these tactics are going to work against the last backyard visitor: the bear. If you live in an area prone to bears wandering through, the only thing you can really do if they find your feeder is take it down for a few weeks to allow the bear to move on.



SQUIRREL DETERRENTS

Unfortunately, squirrels are smart little critters.

Fortunately, there are still ways to keep them out of your bird seed and off your feeders.

From baffles to hot sauces, there are plenty of ways to deter your fluffy-tailed visitor.



BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to thebirdstore.blogspot.com. **All bird walks are weather permitting and cancellations are posted to our blog by the morning of around 8:00 a.m.**

The Sunday Bird Walk leaves The Backyard at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings, or on location at 9:15 a.m.

The Parksville/Qualicum Beach Tuesday Bird Walk meet up location is the Parksville Tourist Information Center parking lot by Highway 19, Northwest Bay Rd. and Franklin's Gull Rd. in Parksville, also at 9 a.m., or on location at 9:15 a.m.

The Tuesday Bird Walk is not held during the summer months (July & August) but it resumes the first Tuesday in September. There is no charge for our bird walks, and they are designed to conclude before lunch (average approximately 2 hours).

We decide on the location of each bird walk the week before the scheduled bird walk outing. During the week we compile information about what birds are being seen and examine the weather forecast to ensure the walk is scheduled for the most productive location.

All experience levels welcome. Bring your own binoculars when possible for the best experience.

Check out [our online map](#) for common bird walk locations around Nanaimo and Parksville.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday-Saturday 9:30-5:30

Sunday 12:00-4:30

UPCOMING HOLIDAY HOURS

July 1st, Canada Day: CLOSED

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Follow Us:  @TheBackyardWildbirdStore

 @thebirdstore_nanaimo

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Report bird sightings by emailing birding@thebackyard.ca or calling 250-390-3669

MAY 11TH

Whimbrel at Piper's Lagoon Entrance.

MAY 15TH

Black-headed Grosbeak in Errington.

MAY 19TH

Cedar Waxwing at Diver's Lake.

MAY 20TH

Osprey Pair at Long Lake.

MAY 27TH

3 *Evening Grosbeaks* at a backyard on Maki Road.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR MARCH

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

June 12th and June 26th

South Nanaimo to Duncan

June 5th and June 19th

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

CEDAR WAXWINGS

Watch for Cedar Waxwings in trees.

WATER

The sound of moving water attracts birds, and water can be harder to find for birds in the summer heat.

CHIPPED SUNFLOWER

If you find medium chipped sunflower still a little messy, switch to fine chip for the smaller chunks.

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAKS AND WESTERN TANAGERS

Have also been sighted in Nanaimo recently.

FIELD NATURALIST GROUPS

[Nature Nanaimo](#) | [Arrowsmith Naturalists](#) | [Comox Valley Nature](#) | [Cowichan Valley Naturalist Society](#) | [Malaspina Naturalists](#) | [Rocky Point Bird Observatory](#) | [Saltspring Trail & Nature Club](#) | [Victoria Natural History Society](#) | [Yellowpoint Ecological Society](#)

