

THE BACKYARD NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2023



BUSHTITS: THE NONDESCRIPT, CONSTANTLY ON THE MOVE LITTLE BIRD

Bushtits have been regular visitors to backyard suet feeders since the early 2000s, something thought to be related to limited natural food sources available nearby. While their main food source is insects, bushtits will also feed on some seeds and fruit. When visiting backyards bushtits are partial to suet, though they have been seen feeding on peanut halves and hulled sunflower seeds.

During the fall and winter bushtits can create a lot of activity in your backyard as they flock together in groups of 20 or more. Bushtits will take turns at the suet feeder, with four or so birds on at a time while the rest flit around nearby trees or shrubs until their turn. Once the entire flock has fed, they vanish as quickly as they came.

These little birds are only about four inches in size, a bit smaller than a chickadee. They have a long tail compared with their body size, and no distinguishable field marks. Bushtits are a very nondescript gray bird that is described in field guides as being gray with a bit of a brown cap, with a thin bill smaller than that of a chickadee.



As they are always on the move, Bushtits chatter to each other constantly. Many times, people hear them without seeing them, as they flit high in the treetops calling to each other with short *tsip* or *tseep* calls. They are very flighty birds and disappear into the trees and bushes at the slightest hint of danger.

As spring approaches, bushtits pair off and establish territories to nest in. The paired bushtits will try several nest sites by hanging spiderwebs from vegetation before choosing one. Bushtits will build their nests on trees anywhere from three to a hundred feet high. The nests are sack-like and hang below branches. Bushtit nests can often be found beside trails and pathways, so make sure to keep an eye out if you go walking.

BUSHTIT NESTS

- Looks like a sack hanging below a branch.
- 7-10 inches long, constructed over approximately 30 days.
- Nests are weaved from the top down, with entrance hole near the top.
- Use fine fibers, leaves, grass, & spider webs for nest construction and cover it in moss for camouflage
- Inside is lined with feathers, plant down, & hair



FEEDING BIRDS NOT COMMON AT FEEDERS

We've already had a decent dumping of snow, but the winter season isn't over yet, and it's important to keep bird baths and food available. Each day birds need to intake enough energy to survive the day and night, only to do it again the next day. As birds do not put on fat layers, they have to feed frequently to keep their energy up.

For most of our other backyard birds, keeping the bird feeders filled with good seed is a great help, but what about those bird that eat ground insects and berries like American Robins?

To make sure that these birds also have a supply of food, you can place a tarp, piece of plywood, or other object on the lawn to create a warm spot free of snow and frozen soil. To feed the birds, simply move the object and allow them access to the unfrozen soil and the insects within. You can also turn the garden soil, about 12" deep, to allow access to insects.

Other foods that can be placed out for robins and thrush are grated suet, apples, blueberries, and cranberries. Towhees and juncos can also enjoy these treats.





HOW TO DETER SQUIRRELS AND OTHER UNDESIRABLE VISITORS

Squirrels are a backyard visitor that not everyone enjoys having around. Putting out food for your birds such as sunflower seeds, peanut halves, and suet can attract squirrels to hang around and eat up all the bird food. To help keep squirrels out of feeders and leave more food for your birds, you can use a Squirrel Buster Feeder, a squirrel baffle, cayenne pepper, or move your feeder to make it harder to get to.

Squirrel Buster Squirrel Proof Bird Feeders are an excellent choice to keep your seed from being gobbled up by a hungry squirrel. The feeder's are all weighted so when your squirrel climbs on to feast, the shroud pulls down and covers the feeding ports. He can climb all over it, but won't get any seed. Birds, being very light, have no problems eating from these feeders.

Another option, if your feeder is on a standalone pole is a **squirrel baffle**. Adding a squirrel baffle to the pole can make it a lot more difficult for your furry visitor to climb up the pole to your bird feeder. When adding a baffle, keep in mind that your pole has to be far enough away from anything the squirrel can jump over from to avoid them simply bypassing your baffle.

Moving feeders so that the squirrel cannot jump up or sideways onto it can also really help. Squirrels can jump approx. 4ft up and 6ft over without much issue so be sure to hang your bird feeders in an open location with nothing nearby for the squirrel to jump over from, and making sure the feeders themselves are 5ft or higher off the ground. Moving feeders into harder to reach locations is best paired with a squirrel baffle, so they cannot simply climb up your pole.

Adding **cayenne pepper** to your bird seed or using **hot pepper suet** in your suet feeder can deter squirrels as well. While rodents have taste buds, birds do not and aren't bothered by the heat. This is a mostly effective solution, though there has been a few reports of squirrels that seem to enjoy their food spicy.

Of the mentioned options, perhaps the most effective is going to be the Squirrel Busters. As long as the feeder is placed in a location that forces the squirrel to put their weight on the feeder, they will be unable to get to the seed.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, JOIN 'EM FEEDING SQUIRRELS

If you are interested in feeding your backyard squirrels, they are fond of peanuts in the shell, sunflower seeds, and dried corn. Squirrel feeders should be set up along the squirrels regular route to make them easier to find, while also being somewhere visible to allow you to watch.

The larger Eastern Gray Squirrels come in a variety of colours like gray, brown, and black, and are an invasive species, while the smaller, native Red Squirrel is sometimes referred to as a chipmunk when spotted. Though the Grays had pushed the native Reds out of their habitat, we are starting to see the Reds coming back and coexisting with the larger squirrels.



TIPS & TRICKS FOR KEEPING HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS FROM FREEZING

Save yourself from having to wake up before dawn to put out your thawed hummingbird feeder with one of our tips for keeping your nectar a liquid.

Hummingbird Feeder Heaters are a fantastic way to keep nectar drinkable with very little effort. The attachment hooks on to most existing feeders and uses a small lightbulb to give off enough heat to keep nectar from freezing.

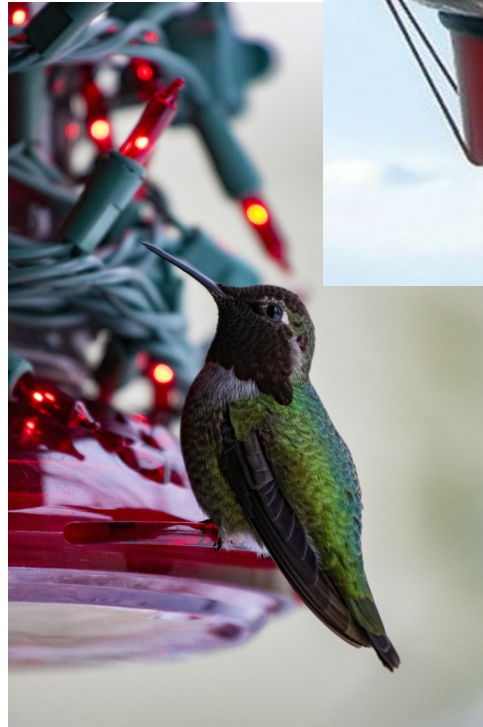
Incandescent Light Bulbs or **Trouble Lights** hung very close to the feeder can give off heat and help stave off freezing.

Incandescent Christmas Lights wrapped around bottle style feeders or balled up and hung below your feeder. Cover hummingbird feeder with insulation like a woolen sock, bubble wrap, etc. will help prevent freezing.

*Note: Use insulation with **Christmas lights** or **trouble lights** for best results.*

Moving the feeder closer to your house and under the soffit will help delay freezing.

How do you keep your feeder from freezing?



HUMMER HEARTH HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER HEATER

Works best with **saucer style** hummingbird feeders as the nectar reservoir sits directly above the heat source, resulting in minimal heat loss.

\$54.99

A flock of crows is called a murder, but what is a flock of hummingbirds called?

A flock of hummingbirds is referred to as a charm, a bouquet, a glittering, or a shimmer, among others.



CHOOSING BINOCULARS

Choosing the right binoculars for you can seem like a chore, but it's important to take your time and talk to someone knowledgeable to make sure you get a pair well-suited for your purposes.

First, you have to know what you are wanting to use them for. Are they primarily for birding, or are you more into sports events or going to the opera? Having a solid idea of what you will be using them for can help narrow down your initial choices. Keep in mind that when comparing binoculars, compare the same magnifications. Don't compare a 10x to an 8x, they won't be the same.

Binoculars are commonly referred to by numbers such as 8x42, or 10x32, etc. The first number is the magnification, which determines how many times closer the object will appear to be. Please note, the more powerful the magnification, the higher chance you will have of lens shake and a blurrier view.

The second number is the size of the objective lens, which affects how much light gets in. Smaller lenses let in less light, which shows less detail, while larger lenses are brighter with greater details.

The image quality is heavily reliant on the lens quality. Higher lens quality does mean more expensive binoculars, but it can be worth it depending on what you are going to use them for and how often.

Make sure to look through the binoculars before buying to ensure the lens is clear with no blurry areas or colour variation from your natural eye.

When setting the binoculars up for use, start by aligning your eyes to the eyecups. If you are wearing glasses, make sure the eyecups are twisted all the way in. Choose something in your field of view to focus on, and close your right eye. Using your left eye and the main adjustment ring, focus the object as clear as possible. Then switch to your right eye, and focus on the same object using the diopter ring (usually found on the right eye piece) to bring the object into clear focus.

This should be the only time you have to adjust the diopter ring, unless you have someone else using your binoculars. Otherwise, you should be able to bring objects into clear focus using only the main adjustment.

Your binoculars are now ready to go!

Tips:

When trying to find an object with your binoculars, keep your eyes on the object and bring your binoculars up to them.

To keep binoculars more stable, tucking your elbows in when using them can help with shake.

Always protect your binoculars from being knocked into hard objects that can put them out of alignment.



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BINOCULARS
AND SCOPES
10% OFF

IN STOCK ONLY
ENDS FEB. 11/23



BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to [our blog](#).

The Sunday Bird Walk leaves The Backyard at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings.

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.

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.

Our bird walks are resuming on **Sunday, February 5th** and **Tuesday, February 7th**. The Sunday walk will be going to Buttertubs Marsh, and the Tuesday walk will be at the Englishman River Estuary, Shelly Road side.

All bird walks are weather permitting and cancellations posted to our blog morning of.

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

UPCOMING HOLIDAY HOURS

Family Day, February 20th: CLOSED

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday-Saturday 9:30-5:30

Sunday 12:00-4:30

Closed Most Stat Holidays

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

CLEANING OUT NEST BOXES

It's almost time for the birds to start nesting, and definitely time to make sure your nest box is clean and ready for new occupants.

MASON BEE COCOONS

By now you should have your mason bee cocoons clean and the tubes replaced in your mason bee house.

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRDS

The Rufous should be on their way back up by March, keep an eye out for their rusty-red colouring at your hummingbird feeder.

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