



THE BACKYARD NEWSLETTER

JULY 2023

BACKYARD NESTING

Summer is heading into full swing and it's a great time to have backyard feeders. The first broods of young are now out and about begging the adults for food, copying their parents without knowing why, and beginning to learn how to fly. Having fledglings to watch can be very entertaining with all their antics.

With all this activity around young birds, we will occasionally spot one that looks like they have been abandoned to run around on the ground. Our first instinct is going to be to offer some help or rescue the young bird and take care of it, but this is likely unnecessary. The bird may appear alone and without help but in most cases the adults are not far and are keeping an eye on the juvenile. Removing the young bird in this situation can create problems and it is better to watch and observe as long as the young is in no immediate danger or distress. Simply keep an eye out for predators and if the bird is in a dangerous location, such as roads or walking paths, move them into a nearby bush. The fledglings on the ground are not usually in danger and are in fact learning. This is the step they take before they begin to fly.

If the bird is too young (lacking feathers) and has obviously fallen out of a nest, try and find the nest to place the bird back. Don't be concerned about getting your scent on the bird as that will not affect the parents willingness to care for the young. If the nest has also fallen with the bird, try and get it up as high as possible and secured near where it fell.



If you cannot find the nest, make up a basket or something to place the young in and get it up high and secure near where you found the baby.

If the bird is injured or ill, do not attempt to help it on your own. Contact your local wildlife rehabilitator or veterinarian for the steps to take. Don't try feeding the young, if you have to move them just put them in a dark box somewhere quiet and contact your local experts. You mean well but without training and knowledge you can do more harm than good.

The best thing to do to help your backyard birds is to provide them with a safe feeding environment. This includes keeping your feeders clean and topped up, and can involve putting out a bird bath or other shallow dish of water.

HOUSE VS PURPLE FINCH

FEMALE HOUSE FINCH (LEFT) AND FEMALE PURPLE FINCH (RIGHT)



FEMALE HOUSE FINCH

small-bodied finch
long, flat head
notched tail
grayish brown with thick, blurry streaks
long tail for their size

FEMALE PURPLE FINCH

large and chunky compared to small forest birds (chickadee etc.)
grayish brown with crisp streaks
whitish eyebrow and mustache stripes
dark line down the side of the throat



BREWER'S BLACKBIRD THE PARKING LOT BIRD

The Brewer's blackbird is a common bird in urban areas, though it is less common at backyard feeders. They are usually found around marshes like Buttertubs but have thrived in urban development areas, often being seen hopping around parking lots.

Unlike other blackbirds, the male Brewer's blackbird has a distinctive yellow eye. Young males will have grey or white-ish eyes that change colour to the signature yellow as they mature. Male Brewer's blackbirds have glossy black feathers with a blue or purplish tinge to the back and neck. Their tails are long and wider at the bottom, much like a boat tail.

Female Brewer's blackbirds are smooth, consistent brown with darker brown or black near their tails. They have no streaking or other markings, and their eyes are black instead of the male's yellow.

Brewer's blackbirds primarily feed on insects and seeds in their natural wild habitat but will also go for any scraps they can find in urban environments.

When nesting, the Brewer's blackbird can nest in colonies ranging from a couple of pairs to over a hundred nesting pairs. Females are in charge of choosing the nesting site and can build the nest in ten days. Brewer's blackbirds may also nest alone in shrubs or trees and can swoop down and attack any creature they find intruding in their territory. Male Brewer's are great fighters and will defend their territory against other birds or predators such as hawks. If you end up on the Brewer's warpath, get out of the area as quickly as possible. The faster you leave their territory the quicker they'll stop attacking you. Once nesting is complete, Brewer's blackbirds will leave their territory until the next year.

Attract Brewer's blackbirds to your yard by putting out white millet or hulled sunflower seeds in a hopper or tray style feeder.



Add a bird bath dripper to your backyard. Runs off water pressure to drip into the basin. An easy way to regularly refresh your bird bath.

\$75.99



SUET—A GOOD ADDITION TO FEEDING STATIONS



MAKE YOUR OWN SUET CAKES!

Interested in making your own suet cakes? In his book *Gardening for Wildlife*, Bill Merilees details what he called the **Woodpecker Mix**:

- 1 PART** peanut butter
- 2 PARTS** melted suet
- 2 PARTS** cornmeal
- 4 PARTS** finely ground corn **or** fine chipped sunflower

Mix and cool in the fridge

**Other great additions to homemade suet cakes include insects and peanuts! High in protein and fat, these ingredients attract those birds that enjoy suet.

**Avoid adding bird seed (excluding hulled sunflower, which can be added in moderation) as the birds going for suet aren't looking for the nutrition in seeds but the high energy they can get from the suet itself.

Use Pure Suet to make your own suet cakes!

\$5.99 EA.
\$50.90 CASE OF 10



Adding suet to a bird feeding station may be thought of as a winter addition but it can be great any time of year. Having suet available year round is beneficial for your birds, and is fun to watch as well. Birds that enjoy suet will always go for natural food sources such as bugs, berries, and seeds, first and aren't going to be dependant on having suet always out.

Suet feeders are a great addition to any backyard feeding station. Real beef kidney suet, not the cheaper tallow found in some cheaper suets, is a source of protein and fat for any birds that enjoy suet. The most common birds you may find at your suet feeder year round are chickadees, nuthatches, bushtits, and various woodpeckers. Sparrows and other ground feeding birds can also enjoy suet, but are less likely to be seen hanging off the feeders. Ground birds aren't as able to hang off suet feeders as woodpeckers or chickadees but they will scavenge on the ground under the feeder for any bits knocked free by feeding birds. You can also break up suet chunks into a ground tray feeder for these birds to enjoy. Orange-crowned Warblers and Bewick's Wrens may also be infrequent visitors to suet feeders.

Not all birds that enjoy suet are going to be birds most people want hanging around. European Starlings, for example, are attracted to suet and will devour it very quickly and messily. To discourage these birds, try using an upside down suet feeder. Woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees will naturally feed upside down but starlings and other nuisance birds have a harder time. It may not stop them entirely but it definitely slows them down!

Suet is a good option to have available for your birds because it's a high energy food source. The beef kidney suet present in our suet cakes is from the kidneys of cattle and sheep. Real kidney suet has a higher density and is harder than the tallow, or fat, that some of the cheaper suets will use. Beef kidney suet is also higher in calories and lasts better in the rain and the heat. Suet cakes made with tallow are more likely to melt at lower temperatures or be filled with bird seed instead of the peanuts and insects the birds are interested in.

There are a variety of ways to hang your suet cakes from onion sacks to specific suet cages. Smaller birds can use the onion sacks or similar but to attract woodpeckers we recommend using cage feeders. Choosing a cage suet feeder with a tail prop addition can also encourage woodpeckers to stick around longer. Tail prop feeders give woodpeckers, and the smaller birds, a place to brace their tails while they eat. If you see a woodpecker in the wild you will notice they will brace their tail on the tree as they pound away.

A suet feeder can be a fantastic addition to feeding stations year round.



SUMMER BIRD FEEDING TIPS

With summer here and the first broods of young fledged and flying, birding activity in backyards is picking up. There are a few common questions we tend to get around this time of year.

How do I keep bird seed from growing in my garden?

There are a couple of possible solutions to this problem. You can try heat treating your bird seed before you put it in the feeder. Place an inch or so of bird seed into a casserole dish and heat your oven to 220°C. Bake the casserole dish of bird seed for around 20 minutes, which should kill the germination of the seed without roasting it. Try and avoid overbaking your seeds as roasting bird seed will eliminate the nutrition your birds are looking for.

You can also change the type of seed you are using. Birds will dig through and toss around mixes to find the seeds they prefer, leading to mess being left on the ground that may grow. Putting out just one type of seed per feeder can cut down on what gets tossed out and left to grow or mold. Hulled sunflower seed tends to be the most effective for eliminating mess, and if you are using black oil sunflower seed try pre-cracking the seeds using scrap wood or a mallet. Put the seed in a bag and hammer on it to crack the shells and make it easier for the birds to get to the seed.

How can I attract more birds during summer?

One of the best ways to attract birds is with water. A shallow dish, 2" in depth or less, can attract a wide variety of birds to your yard you may not see just by putting out feeders. Warblers, swallows, and thrushes, for example, are more likely to come for water.

To help birds find the water supply, add the sound of moving water. Birds find everything by sight and hearing, and they have great hearing. Adding a bubbler or a dripper can be an easy way to create that sound. Homemade drippers are also a great option and can be as simple as turning your garden hose to barely on and hanging it above the bath, or hanging a pop bottle with a hole in the bottom to drip into the bath. Be sure to place your bird bath in the open to allow the birds to find it more easily.

Should I put up a nest box now or move my existing one?

Providing birds with a nest box is a great way to enjoy the birds in the backyard but sometimes it can take time for the birds to begin to use the box. Patience is, unfortunately, the key. While ideally you would have the box up and ready by the end of February, you can always try putting one up now. Sometimes you get lucky and the birds will use the box for their second brood of young. Many cavity nesters such as chickadees, nuthatches, and sparrows will have two broods a year and will not always use the same nest for both.

Once you've put out the box, leave it in the same spot for at least two years before trying to move it. Sometimes birds will note the spot for later use or for the next year and constantly moving the box can be detrimental for getting it used. If after two or so years it's still not being used, then try a new location.

Backyard birding is enjoyable year round and the summer season allows us to see a different side of how the birds survive.



LADYBUGS FOR APHID CONTROL



Having aphid problems? We carry ladybugs! A widely recognized aphid predator, ladybugs will also go for a variety of other pests and soft-bodied bugs. Ladybugs should be released at dusk when the temperature starts to lower, and it's recommended to give your plants a good misting before releasing them to give them a drink right away.

250 Ladybugs for \$22.50

What do you call a party with only two crows?

Attempted murder!



BATS

Bats are portrayed in media as blood sucking creatures of darkness, but in reality they are a beneficial visitor that helps control your backyard insect population.

Bats are a unique creature, being the only true flying mammal. They have wings not dissimilar to a human hand, with the four 'fingers' making up the ribs of their wings and the thumb equivalent being small and hooked to aid them in climbing. Bats lifespans are relatively long, with some living up to 35 years.

Ten of the sixteen bat species found in British Columbia have been recorded on Vancouver Island. The most common bats we hear about are the Little and Big Brown Bats and their many subspecies that are only distinguished through DNA testing.

Having bats in your backyard will not result in you becoming a vampire, but they do control your backyard bug population. Mosquitos and other insects that are active at night are their main prey. Bats are excellent at finding and eating insects and will consume their body weight in bugs each night. That works out to about 600 mosquitoes every hour! A colony of little brown bats can eat 110 lbs., or 50kg., in insects per night. The equivalent for you would be if you ate around 50 large pizzas every day.

The reason bats are so good at night hunting is echolocation. They use high frequency sound waves of a pitch the human ear cannot hear. Bats produce this sound through their mouths and the sound waves bounce off objects and return to the bats ears. They use echolocation to create mental pictures of their surroundings. Echolocation in bats is so effective they can find a single strand of hair in a pitch black room. Despite this evolutionary trait, bats can actually see quite well.

Bats are usually found roosting in hot, dark places such as attics though they can also be found on trees, the siding of houses, or anywhere else it's warm and dark. Roosting bats will hang upside down by their feet, which automatically grip with the bats body weight and use very little energy. If you have bats in your attic you don't want, you must find all the possible entrance holes and close them up. Bats can fit into anything a quarter inch wide or larger.

Attracting bats to your yard is not as easy as attracting songbirds. They can be more commonly found around water sources that have plentiful insects such as lakes, rivers, and marshes, but are less common in more developed areas lacking these food sources. Bats are also instinctually driven to return to places they have already roosted.

Developed areas are more likely to see single, 'bachelor' bats around dusk. Bachelors are male bats without a colony and tend to be infrequent visitors.

If you already have bats in the area, you can attract them to your yard using a bat box. Bat boxes come in many styles but we recommend those with multiple chambers, meant to hold an entire colony. The box should be made with rough lumber or have a mesh lining on the inside to give the bats something to grip. Boxes are usually 15 to 24 inches long and painted dark colours to attract heat. Place the box at least 15 feet high in an open area, facing towards the morning sun.



BAT BOXES

Bat Boxes are available in single and multi-chamber and only work if you already have bats in the area. Unlike bird houses, bat houses should be painted dark colours and put somewhere high and open that gets plenty of sunlight.



BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to [our blog](#). **Bird walks have been TEMPORARILY PAUSED for summer and will resume in fall.**

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.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday-Saturday 9:30-5:30

Sunday 12:00-4:30

Closed Most Stat Holidays

DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR JULY

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

July 12th and July 26th

South Nanaimo to Duncan

July 5th and July 19th

CONTACT US

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BIRD SIGHTINGS

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

MAY 24TH

House Wren on Thetis Island.

MAY 26TH

Black Swift and *Purple Martin* at French Creek.

JUNE 8TH

Olive-sided Flycatcher at Cougar Trail Road.

JUNE 22ND

Pacific Golden Plover at Englishman River Estuary—Mariner Way.

JUNE 22ND

Arctic Loon at Departure Bay Ferry Terminal.

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

UPCOMING HOLIDAY HOURS

Labour Day, Sept. 4th: CLOSED

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

HUMMINGBIRD NECTAR

As it warms up, switch your hummingbird nectar more often to prevent spoiling.

WATER

Having a shallow dish of water out for the birds.

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRDS

Rufous are leaving to migrate back to Mexico until next year.

FLEDGLINGS

Look for young birds visiting your backyard feeders! They may be fluffier and unsure as they explore the world.

