



K. MacDonald

Birding IN THE Backyard

MAY 2026

BELTED KINGFISHER

BY KELSEY

The Belted Kingfisher is a large, stocky bird with a shaggy crest and thick, daggerlike bill. They have a large head, short legs, and a square-tipped, mid-length tail.

Unlike the majority of local species, the female Belted Kingfisher is actually the more colourful one, and the bird is named for her colouration, not his.

Both male and female kingfishers are a blue-gray on their back and head, with white spotting in their wings and tail as well as white underparts cut through by a blue-gray chest band. The female Belted Kingfisher has a rusty chestnut band across her belly, giving the species its' name.

They feed primarily on fish and other aquatic prey. Kingfishers forage by perching on branches, telephone wires, or other high areas over water, watching for prey near the surface of the water body. Once prey is spotted, the kingfisher dives to plunge headfirst, eyes closed, into the shallow water after their target.

The prize is caught with a pincer like motion in the birds' bill, and when the bird returns to its' perch it will slam their prey against it before swallowing it. Belted Kingfishers will also sometimes hover above the water instead of perching nearby when hunting.

Common prey of the Belted Kingfisher include sticklebacks, trout, crayfish and other crustaceans, amphibians, and more where available. They're also fond of goldfish in backyard ponds when they can get some.

When they're young nestlings, the kingfishers actually digest the bones and scales of prey, but once they're old enough to leave the nest, they will instead vomit up pellets of skeletons and shells, similar to owl pellets.

The Belted Kingfisher is a fairly solitary bird that pairs up

monogamously during the nesting season. When building their nest, the kingfishers will excavate a burrow in an earthy bank, usually near water but above the flood line. They've also been known to nest in ditches, road cuts, landfills, and sand or gravel pits away from water.

The pair digs the burrow in turns, though the male does the majority. Once complete, the burrow can extend from 3 to 6 feet and slope upwards into a 8-12" by 6-7" chamber.

Once the breeding season is over, the pair splits and resumes their solitary lifestyle. Next year, both will choose a new partner for the season.



J. Morrison

CANADA GOOSE VS CACKLING GOOSE

CANADA GOOSE (LEFT) AND CACKLING GOOSE (RIGHT)



CANADA GOOSE
—R. HOCKEN

THE CANADA GOOSE is a large bird with a long, black neck and white cheek patch. They have a brown body with a paler chest that fades to white under their tail. The geese have webbed feet and a wide, flat bill.

CACKLING GEESE are small and compact with a short black neck, steep forehead, and small bill. They have a large white cheek patch on their otherwise black head, and white under their tail. Their bodies are overall brown, though it can range from dark to pale.

Both geese may flock together and be difficult to pick out due to their very similar colouring. Look at the neck and face for identification help.



CACKLING GOOSE
—SHALLOWSKY.COM



R. Hocken

NESTING GOLDFINCH

BY KELSEY

The American Goldfinch have arrived and, unlike other birds in our area, they aren't nesting *quite* yet. But why?

Unlike most birds, who feed their young insects until they fledge the nest, American Goldfinch are strict vegetarians from birth. They rely on thistle and milkweed to both feed their young and as an important part of the nest. This means that their nesting period starts in June or July instead of earlier in the year like most other birds.

Goldfinch nests are often high in a shrub where two to three vertical branches have joined. They also prefer spots where leaves of needles shade the nest from above, though it's often visible from below if you search carefully.

Though the location is decided by the pair, the nest is built by the female. She starts with an open outer cup of twigs held together by spider silk, which is also used to attach the nest to its supporting branches, then adds an inner cup made of small roots and debris from plants. The nest is then lined with fluffy plant 'pappus' and other downy materials.

The completed nest takes roughly 6 days to assemble, and is often woven so tightly together that it can actually hold water! If you're looking to spot one, the nest is only around 3 inches across by 2 to 4 1/2 inches tall, so be sure to look carefully, and try not to disturb them.

American Goldfinch may have 1 or 2 broods per season. The pair has between 2 and 7 eggs per clutch, that are incubated for roughly two weeks before hatching. Once hatched, the altricial chicks stay in the nest for 11 to 17 days before fledging.

The goldfinch can be attracted to backyard feeders filled with nyjer seed and sunflower seeds, and are especially fond of a finer chipped sunflower when available. Watch for the male's brilliant yellow breeding plumage at your feeder.

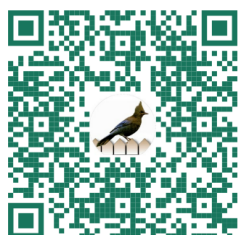
Yellow-topped Finch Feeder

Durable metal construction with an easy twist off lid and base. Easy to fill and clean, it holds 3lbs. of Nyjer seed.

Mesh construction allows the birds to cling and grab seeds.



\$49.99 ea.



I FOUND A BABY BIRD!

WHAT DO I DO?

BY KELSEY

It's the perfect time of the year for young birds to start leaving the nest and running, or flying, around in backyards. It's also the time when we start getting calls about abandoned, injured, or otherwise grounded birds that may not actually be in any danger.

For some birds, fledging from the nest doesn't mean taking off straight away into the air. Instead, they spend a few days running around on the ground and getting acclimated to the area.

If you've discovered a young bird hanging around your yard, there's a few things to think about before you even try to intervene.

Firstly, is the bird a nestling or a fledgling?

Nestlings are very young birds that aren't fully feathered, should be in their nest, and aren't able to source their own food. They're likely to not be able to hop or walk, and definitely can't fly.

Nestlings may fall out of their nest before they're ready, though it isn't common. Look closely in trees, shrubs, and bushes around where you've found the nestling and quickly move the bird back to the nest, if you can find it. Don't worry about handling the young bird; the parent's won't abandon it if you've picked it up. If you can't spot the nest, attach a basket or similar around 6 feet off the ground where you found the baby, and put it inside, then watch for an adult.

Fledglings, on the other hand, are more commonly spotted by people. They're still young birds, but have purposefully left the nest. Fledglings are fully feathered, usually fluffy looking with a stubby little tail. They're also usually active, running and hopping around.

Even if you spot the nest the fledgling has left, don't bother with trying to put it back. Once they leave, they're unlikely to return and will often just hop back out if you try.

Though they may be running around on the ground and not able to fly, their parents should be nearby keeping an eye on them. Unless they're in immediate danger or obvious distress, simply leave the bird to it's own devices and try to keep children and pets out of the area if you can.

If you watch long enough to spot the parents coming around, you may see the fledgling suddenly forget how to eat and exhibit a begging behaviour with an open mouth and fluttering wings. Once the parent leaves again, they will resume feeding.

The second thing to consider is the status of the bird. Are they in a safe location? Are they injured?

If the bird is in an obviously dangerous area or near a predator, you can move them to a safer location...if you can catch it.

If you notice a fledglings, or any other bird, that is obviously injured, lethargic, or otherwise in distress, it's recommended to contact a licensed rehabilitator for advice and steps to follow.

If you can catch the bird, putting them inside a breathable box or container with a soft towel inside, without food or water, and moving them to a dark, quiet location is ideal until you've talked to a professional.

The last thing to remember is to stop and think if you need to intervene.

Your first instinct may be to immediately rush in and try to help, but there's every chance that it's not necessary. Which is a good thing! The vast majority of young birds reported as abandoned are perfectly healthy young fledglings taking their first steps out of the nest, and we love to see it.

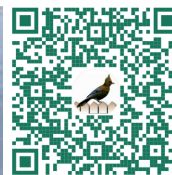


DANCING BIRD STAKES

Each bird is perched atop a 35" galvanized steel stake, with a swivel-hinge that allows them to twist and dip in the wind.

Their PVC construction is lightweight and moves easily even in a light breeze.

\$64.99 ea.



DID YOU KNOW?

Juvenile chickadees fly right out of the nest, but juncos run around on the ground first?



THE PANTRY MOTH-MAN PROPHECIES

BY DAVE



D. Veljacic



D. Veljacic



D. Veljacic

If you see one, does it mean a bridge is going to collapse? No, but you *are* going to have to go through all your dry goods.

There are several species of moth commonly found raiding food stocks around the world. All of them are small, ~2cm long, and fairly drab in colour. The most commonly encountered in our region are the Indian Meal Moth, *Plodia interpunctella*, and the Mediterranean Flour Moth, or *Ephestia kuehniella*.

As both species cause the same issues, and are dealt with in the same manner, I won't bother with lengthy descriptions about the differences between them. It would just drive me bonkers as I tried to be concise, which I'm not particularly good at.

Adult moths live for 30 to 45 days. The females can lay up to 500 eggs, though the average is closer to 300, that hatch within 4 to 10 days. After hatching, the larvae crawl around spinning webs and pooping for 2 to 3 months, usually in any nearby dry foods including cereals, grains, dried fruits, crackers, spices, and pet food.

After that, they crawl out in search of a suitable spot to spin their protective webbing into a concentrated clump of a cocoon, where they spend 15 to 20 days becoming the glorious little flying ***censored***s they were destined to be. With both of these moth species, it's only the caterpillars that do the damage as they eat, poop and spin webs in our food. The adults don't even have mouthparts!

If you see a really small moth flying around your dry goods in a zig-zag-y pattern, it's time to inspect your food. Keep in mind that the caterpillars can move quite some distance! Look for teeny tiny clusters of creamy yellow eggs, webbing, or cream to pink maggoty-looking caterpillars with dark heads in any grains, seeds, dried fruits, crackers, spices, pet food, etc.

Their small cocoons may be found along edges, seams, hinges, and peg holes of nearby shelves as well as in woven or metal baskets, and around the edges of jar lids or other non-food items. While the insects themselves aren't actually harmful, the mold that grows on their *frass* (bug poop) can be.

Pantry moth infested foods should be thrown out, composted, or otherwise taken directly outside to keep the caterpillars from developing into moths and infesting the rest of your food. Moving food into glass, silicone, or hard plastic containers can also keep the larvae with their chewing mouth parts at bay, reducing the risk of infestation.

Another step to take is to keep your pantry cool. This slows the breeding and development of any existing moths. You can also add pheromone traps, which work by attracting the male moths and depriving females of *bow-chicka-wow-wow*, in order to prevent any more population growth.

If you have pantry moths in some foods but don't see signs in others, store the untainted food in a freezer for roughly two weeks while you get a handle on the infestation. Infested bird seed can also be frozen in order to kill off any moths, eggs, or larvae inside, then be placed in your feeder. The birds *love* a little extra protein!

It's also recommended to keep pet food and bird seed stored away from your dry goods, just in case.

Pantry Moth Traps

Traps and kills Grain Moths, Flour Moths, Meal Moths, and Seed Moths.

Non-toxic and pesticide free way to control and eliminate your pantry moth population using a pheromone lure inside a glue trap.

For inside use only, not made for outdoors.

Use the moth traps in areas where moths or larvae have been spotted.

Contains two traps per box.

\$14.99 ea.



THE BLACK SWIFT: ELUSIVE & ENDANGERED

BY IVY-LYNNE

May 15th is National Endangered Species Day, and I encourage all of you to think about how you can support the avian population and help keep species from extinction so that future generations will continue to be able to watch, feed, and learn about birds like the Black Swift.

Ever since 1901 when the first Black Swift nest was recorded in California, these mysterious birds have been a subject of intrigue amongst birders and ornithologists. The primary thing that was immediately interesting about Black Swifts was their choice of habitat. Black Swifts tend to nest in places that are fairly difficult for humans to reach; in and near cliffsides, behind waterfalls, in seaside caves, and similar.

These nests are typically built high, as Black Swifts require unobstructed flight paths. They fly quickly, whipping through the air, often to catch insects. Flying ants are a very desirable snack, with bodies consisting of 40% fat and 7% glycerin, and offer much more energy than the flies they'll also snatch up.

Black Swifts nests are, due to their location, usually quite cold and may have moss growing underneath and nearby due to the moist environment. This cold climate nesting behaviour is another thing that sets them apart, though researchers believe they may understand the reasoning.

These swifts lay a single egg, usually in June, and have a rather sporadic feeding schedule for the young hatchling. Since Black Swifts often have to forage for dispersed insects to feed their young, the hatchling is often fed only once in the evening and may even miss a day or two of feeding.



This infrequent feeding is theorized to be one of the reasons Black Swifts opt for a cooler nesting climate. Cold areas tend to slow down an animal's metabolism, meaning the irregular schedule wouldn't affect the chick's development as much as if they were in a warmer area.

Black Swift chicks also tend to mature slower than similar birds, and take about forty-five days to fledge from the nest. The slow pace of their reproduction and raising process seems to work in the Black Swifts' favour, as they tend to have longer lifespans.

Researchers from a conservatory in the Colorado Rockies caught a banded female swift in 2023, in the same nest she'd been born in 2005.

Despite their longevity, Black Swifts aren't immune to the dangers of humans and environmental disruption, and their population has taken a nosedive. Since 1973, the population has had an estimated decrease of 50%, leading them to being designated as endangered on Canada's Species at Risk Act.

Paired with their highly specialized diet, this decline isn't wholly unexpected but there are still steps that can be taken in order to mitigate further decline.

An example of a helpful intervention can be seen in the case of the Johnston National Park, in Banff, where Black Swifts have been recorded nesting.

Black Swifts are a species that often returns to the previous years' nest, meaning that ensuring their nesting locations are left undisturbed is paramount.

The Johnston Canyon Trail facilitates this by enforcing a few rules, increasing sign markers that remind visitors to stick to the trail, monitoring closed off areas where Black Swifts have nested, and reminding visitors that disturbing Black Swift nests is against the law, whether they're occupied or empty.

Messing with or disturbing a Black Swift nest can result in a court appearance, or a fine of up to \$25 000.

Black Swifts are a very interesting bird that we still have much to learn about, and they're not the only fascinating avian that we are at risk of never fully understanding or getting to see.

SPRING GARDEN FLAGS

Add a pop of colour to your garden space that you can easily switch for the season!

These garden flags are made with durable, weather resistant materials that resist fading and are made to last.

*Flag stand not included.

\$19.99 ea.



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 the morning of the walk, around 8:00 a.m.

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.

Bird walks are not held during the summer months (July & August) but resume in early September. They also go on pause during the winter (December & January), resuming in early February.

There's no charge for our bird walks, and they are designed to conclude before lunch, averaging roughly 2 hours. All experience levels welcome.

Bring your own binoculars when possible, and decent walking shoes 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

May 18th, *Victoria Day*: CLOSED

CONTACT US

6314 Metral Drive, Nanaimo, BC
250-390-3669
Toll Free 1-888-808-BIRD [2473]

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thebackyard.ca
thebirdstore.blogspot.com

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WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MAY

Add water to your backyard feeding station to help them beat the heat.

Put out high energy snacks like suet, peanut halves, and black oil sunflower to give them a burst of energy during nesting and for juveniles once they fledge.

Mason bee season is coming to a close, but don't move your condos until late summer to allow the larvae to grow to adulthood.

Watch for nesting goldfinch!






DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR MAY

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

May 13th and May 27th

South Nanaimo to Duncan

May 6th and May 20th

May						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
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LOCAL 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](#)

