



K. MacDonald

Birding IN THE Backyard

JULY 2026

THAT'S NO BABY, THAT'S A TEENAGER!

BY KELSEY

The first, and possibly second, brood of young birds are out and about, learning how to survive on their own as their parents run away from their loud, fully mobile offspring pretending they don't know how to feed themselves.

Once they leave the nest, a juvenile bird is fully feathered and basically ready to face the world. Some take off flying straight from the nest, like the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, while others such as Dark-eyed Juncos spend some time running around on the ground first.

Don't worry, the parents of these ground-bound birds are still keeping an eye on them!

Despite these differences, there's one thing plenty of juvenile birds have in common: the 'teenager' phase.

What we like to call a teenage years of a juvenile bird is the short period of time between fledgling and becoming fully independent.

During this time, young birds can still try to rely on their parents for food; meaning they follow them around yelling loudly with their bill open and their wings aflutter. Most of the time, the parents cave and feed them like hatchlings. It's very cute!

Newly fledged birds *can* find their own food, but they don't always want to. If you've ever seen one bird chasing another one down while calling loudly and fluttering their wings, you've seen a teenager.

Sometimes, the parent will instead fly off in exasperation (or the bird equivalent), and the juvenile either follows, still yelling, or proceed to easily feed themselves.



There's even been cases of these birds begging for food off unrelated adult birds, not their parents.

Juveniles can be identified from their adult counterparts in a few ways, including plumage and behaviour.

Plenty of young birds, including the Dark-eyed Junco, have a different plumage from their parents and can be easily identified. Other birds, like Chestnut-backed Chickadees, fledge the nest looking identical to their parents.

You can also tell a young bird from an adult based on behaviour. As mentioned, they may be in the teenager phase and begging for food. Juvenile birds can also be uncertain around feeders, unsteady on perches, or let you get closer than an adult would before finally flying off.

ADULT VS JUVENILE DARK-EYED JUNCO

ADULT JUNCO (LEFT) AND JUVENILE JUNCO (RIGHT)



ADULT DARK-EYED JUNCO
—R. HOCKEN

ADULT JUNCOS are a mid-sized, round-headed sparrow with a small, pale-coloured bill. Their heads are dark, though the female's are a mid-dark gray to the males' black. Their body is a light brown on the back with buffy sides and a white underneath. During flight, watch for the flash of their white outer tail feathers.

JUVENILE JUNCOS are overall streaky brown, though they still have the white outer tail feathers like the adults.

When juncos fledge the nest, they spend a few days running around on the ground before they begin to fly. The parents are usually nearby, and can make quite a racket if they think you're too close to the baby.



JUVENILE DARK-EYED JUNCO
—I. TAYLAR (FLICKR)

ANTS ON HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS

BY KELSEY



Ants are a common pest on backyard hummingbird feeders, especially during the warmer months. It's not uncommon to go to fill a feeder only to find it full of tiny black bodies, with a hummingbird nowhere in sight. But what can you do?

Ants find feeders in one of two ways; either it's hung in a tree or area where they are already searching for food, or they find a drip on the ground and follow it up to your feeder. Once the first ant has found the feeder, they leave a pheromone trail to help direct other members of their colony to the new food source.

If you've found ants in your feeder, the first thing to do is clean it. Dead ants in your hummingbird feeder release *oleic acid*, a chemical that actually makes hummingbirds think twice about using your feeder.

Secondly, either take it down temporarily or move locations to break the pheromone trail and make the ants lose track of the feeder. If you've placed it on a tree branch, we do recommend removing it from the tree entirely unless you want the ants to quickly find it again.

Once the feeder is in its' new location, you don't want the ants to find it again. One option is to add an ant moat, or a shallow bowl above your feeder half filled with water. When the ants reach the water barrier, they can't get across to continue climbing down.

Another option is to switch feeders. Going from a traditional bottle style to a leak free feeder like the saucer styles can cut down on sugar water drips, making it far more difficult for ants to even realize there's a potential food source nearby.

Moving the feeder or cleaning up underneath it regularly can also help, as well as adding a ring of Nectar Fortress around your hanger to stop them from advancing,

Nectar Fortress

Ant-repelling clear gel with cinnamon oil that ants hate. Draw a border and stop them cold. Made with natural ingredients, it's safe for use around birds, children, and pets.



For use with non-porous materials. Dispense a thick line of gel around anything you don't want ants getting to. Great for protecting hummingbird feeders as well as other outdoor areas such as patio tables.

\$15.99 ea.



THE COMMON NIGHTHAWK

BY IVY-LYNNE

July is a prime time to see one of the most well-known birds of the nightjar species; the Common Nighthawk.

Despite the moniker 'common,' Nighthawks are actually quite unique. They are typically described as a mid-sized bird with a barely visible beak and neck. Their most dramatic feature? Wide, black eyes.

The Common Nighthawks' plumage comes in varied shades of gray, white, buff, and black to provide them with excellent camouflage.

Outside their physical features, Nighthawks are also well-known for their unique flight patterns and behaviours. Common Nighthawks during flight can emit a *booming* or loud *whooshing* sound that is often used to identify them.

Usually this sound is produced by male Nighthawks during courtship, though it may also be done as a threat display towards people or birds infringing on the Nighthawk's territory.

The sound is the result of a Nighthawk diving abruptly from high above, and swooping out of the dive. As his wings flex to pull him out of the dive, air rushing across the wingtips creates the characteristic *boom*.

Common Nighthawks can also be recognized by their erratic flights, often likened to bats zipping and diving with no obvious direction as they hunt on the wing. Also like bats, their diet is primarily insects. Much of the Nighthawks' hunting is done at night, and they subsist mostly on flying insects like beetles, moths, termites, and ants.

During nesting, the Common Nighthawk has a rather odd way of laying their eggs. Unlike similar birds who build proper nests, the Nighthawk will choose a semi-flat surface and lay their eggs directly on location. Typically, the eggs are deposited on roofs, open areas lined with gravel, rocky cliff edges, or flat ground with limited vegetation.

During the process, the nesting pair doesn't build any sort of nest around the eggs, or gather any nesting materials. The nesting period usually occurs through the summer months, with some variation depending on habitat.

The female Nighthawk is fully responsible for incubating the eggs, though she shares feeding responsibilities with her male partner.

If the 'nest' fails, the female will abandon the non-viable eggs, pick a new location, and try again.

Once hatched, Nighthawk chicks typically begin flying in slightly over 2 weeks, under their parents' watchful eyes, and reach full maturity in 40 days.

After nesting, the Common Nighthawk migrates south for the winter. Nighthawks are long distance migrants, flying all the way down to South America to escape the cold.

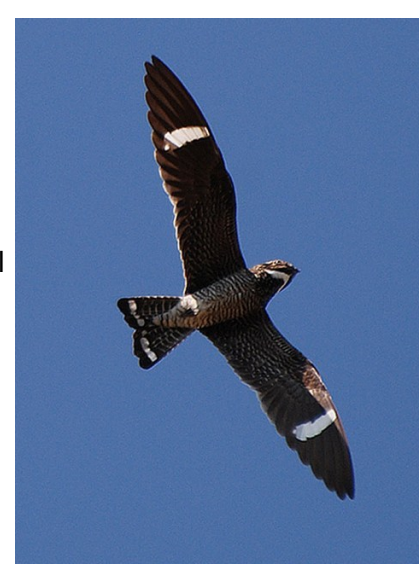
They usually migrate in flocks that can reach hundreds of birds, and travel up to 10 thousand miles, with numerous stops along the way, to reach their destination. Researchers are beginning to recognize the potential importance of the migratory habits of this bird, in the hopes of gaining insight into why more and more Nighthawks are disappearing from our ecosystem.

Under **SARA**, or the federal **Species At Risk Act**, the Common Nighthawk is listed as threatened, with a declining population. Factors like climate change, habitat loss, pollution, invasive species, and the suppression of natural wildfires are having an impact on this bird and its' necessary open habitat.

Being an insectivore, the Common Nighthawk is also threatened by anything that threatens or diminishes the insect population they rely on for food.

The Canadian government has been attempting to aid the Common Nighthawks' population by implementing a recovery strategy. Recovery strategies are a form of policy that addresses if and how an endangered species may be helped.

You can also do your part by contributing to safe climate actions, and learning more about these and other interesting birds!



SEED CAKES & CYLINDERS



Attract a variety of birds while keeping the mess down with seed cakes and cylinders. Available in a variety of flavours, including a hot pepper mix to keep squirrels at bay, there's something to attract every seed eating bird that can get to it.



DID YOU KNOW?

Common Nighthawks are a member of the Nightjar family, which includes the Great-eared Nightjar, a bird known for being very dragon-like in form.



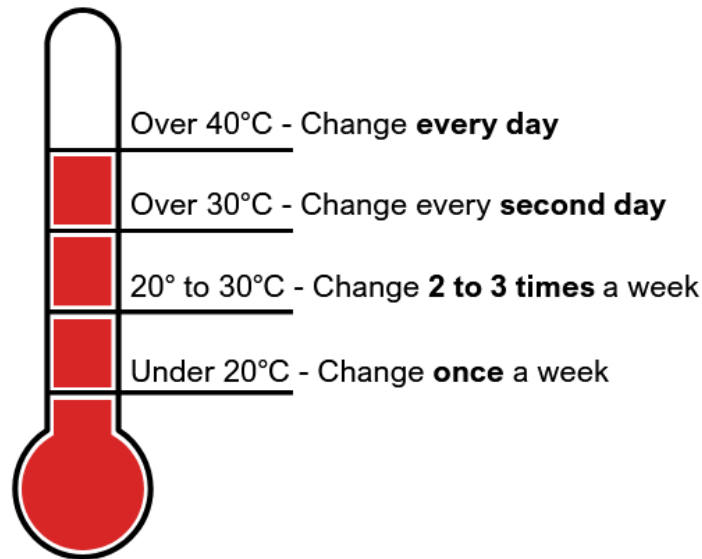
FEEDING HUMMINGBIRDS IN SUMMER

BY KELSEY



WHEN TO REFRESH YOUR SOLUTION

As temperatures heat up, sugar water needs to be changed more frequently to avoid harmful bacteria growth.



When in doubt, change it more frequently.

Hummingbird feeders may be busier in the winter months, or once the Rufous start migrating in or out of our area, but that doesn't mean that you can't keep it going all year long.

As natural food sources begin to bloom, feeders can go quieter. Flower nectar is more attractive to hummingbirds than feeders full of sugar water, but the sugar water is still appreciated!

To keep all visiting hummingbirds healthy and happy, using the correct type of sugar as well as the right ratio of sugar to water and keeping it fresh and clean are all very important.

3 or 4 parts water mixed with 1 part sugar is the closest to natural nectar; any sweeter and it becomes not so healthy. Not sweet enough, and it's not as appealing for them.

Once you've got the ratio down, avoid using organic or brown sugar, honey, artificial sweeteners, or anything that changes the colour of your nectar solution. Only plain, basic table sugar and hot water should be mixed to keep your nectar as close to what's naturally available as you can.

If you're tempted to add any red dye to help them find it more easily, instead tie a red ribbon or bow around the feeder to draw their eye. Just make sure it doesn't move too much in the breeze to avoid spooking them!

Sugar water can be pre-mixed and stored in the fridge for up to two weeks, making it much quicker to clean and refill feeders! Feeder should be cleaned regularly, to avoid harmful bacterial growth. While once a week is sufficient for cooler temperatures, as the heat rises it needs to be done more frequently.

While cleaning your feeder, we recommend avoiding soaps or anything that may leave a residue behind. Instead, use a bleach-water mix of 9 parts water to 1 part bleach, or similar ratio of water and cleaning vinegar (found in hardware stores). Scrub, rinse, and allow to air dry before you put the feeder back out.

Even if it's earlier than you would regularly clean it, if you notice discoloration or anything floating around in the solution, it should be emptied, cleaned, and refilled with fresh nectar.

Feeding your hummingbirds doesn't have to consist of only sugar water, either. Adding native or introduced plants that they enjoy can give your hummingbirds a natural source of nectar that doesn't require the same amount of maintenance.

Another option is to put out some ripe fruits, which spawn the fruit flies that hummingbirds enjoy. While tiny, they are a nutritious snack for any visiting hummers.

Just make sure to set it out far enough away from your house that they don't make their way inside, while still keeping it close enough to watch them enjoy their treat.



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Insulated Hummingbird Feeder

Designed for both hot and cold weather, the Anna's Healthy Hummingbird feeder includes a vacuum insulated chamber underneath an 8oz. nectar reservoir.

The chamber underneath the nectar reservoir can be filled with hot water during the winter, to help slow freezing, or cold water and ice during the summer to slow the fermentation process.

\$59.99 ea.



BIRDS & FEATHERS

BY KELSEY

One of, if not the, most defining feature of a bird are it's feathers. Each feather is a complex, intricate structure that's made up of mostly keratin, like human hair and nails.

Feathers are not only a distinctive feature but also are highly important for birds, being a crucial piece of their flight ability, insulation, and physical protection. Despite their importance, feathers are not a living tissue and are unable to repair themselves once they are damaged or worn.

Even more unfortunately, the life of a bird involves a *lot* of wear. Feathers are worn down when they're exposed to the elements, and with daily use by the bird. They're also prone to fading when exposed to UV radiation, which works to break down the structure of the feather.

Once the feather is compromised, it has to be replaced. The process of replacing compromised feathers is known as **molting**.

There is no set overall time of the year where every bird molts, but they tend to avoid certain seasons. Molting is an energy-intensive process, making birds likely to avoid molting during nesting season or migration, which already take plenty of energy. They are more likely to molt either before or after these activities.

Molts are usually completed once or twice a year, depending on the bird, and can consist of either a complete molt, or just partial.

Full molts do result in the complete replacement of all the birds' feathers, but not all at once. Over an extended period, the bird will periodically lose and regrow feathers across their body.

Partial molts are when a bird doesn't replace all their feathers, only some. Switching from a duller winter plumage to a bright breeding colouration is usually the result of a partial molt.



Most birds fall into three categories for molting. Some have only one complete molt per year, like chickadees, jays, woodpeckers, and hummingbirds.

Others undergo one full and one partial molt, like warblers and tanagers. The full molt usually happens post-breeding season, and the bird molts from their bright breeding plumage to their duller winter feathers. Then, before nesting the next year, they go through a partial molt to regain their bright colouration.

Very few birds will go through two complete molts a year, most of which live in areas that give their feathers quite a beating.

Outside of molting season, birds may still lose a feather or two for some reason. If this happens, they will grow back immediately and not wait until molting season rolls back around.

Once the new feathers start growing in, they're short and covered with a protective sheath of keratin. Newly growing feathers often appear like small quills on the birds, and are highly sensitive due to the blood supply required for growth.

As the feathers grow in, the bird will preen actively to remove the protective keratin and allow the new feather to finish growing in.

Birds during a molt may have patchy, scruffy looking feathers or bald spots.

Outside of the visual cues that tell us when a bird is molting, there are also more behavioural changes that can be observed.

During molting, birds may become less active. They are likely to be subdued and secretive, hiding away in order to conserve energy and stay away from any predators. Increasing their preening frequency is also common, and you may notice they reduce their singing and vocalizations during the molt.

References

<https://biologyinsights.com/when-is-molting-season-for-birds-signs-what-to-expect/>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/the-basics-feather-molt/>

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/understanding-basics-bird-molts>



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99% pure copper is a natural antibacterial agent that helps slow down or stop slime and algae growth in your bird bath.

Just fill your bird bath and place it flat on the bottom, then let it do it's magic!

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BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to thebirdstore.blogspot.com.

Bird walks are on pause for the summer months and should resume in early fall, with exact dates TBD. For updates, check our blog or join our mailing list.

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

July 1st, *Canada Day*: CLOSED

August 3rd, *BC Day*: CLOSED

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN JULY

Seeing less of those bright, pretty yellow birds? It's finally American Goldfinch nesting season!

With the hot weather, adding a water feature to your yard can be extra helpful for all visiting birds.

Avoid the risk of melting, runny suet by making sure to choose higher quality suet cakes that use real beef kidney suet, and not the softer, cheaper tallow.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR JULY

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

July 8th and July 22nd

South Nanaimo to Duncan

July 2nd and July 15th

July						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
			CLOSED	S		
			N			
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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](#)

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