THE BACKYARD
WILDBIRD & NATURE STORE
Enjoying Nature in Your Own Backyard™



Birding IN THE Backyard

NOVEMBER 2026

Tiny, Fluffy, Adorable Bushtits

by Kelsey

A highly social songbird, Bushtits *love* suet. If you've ever looked out and seen your feeder covered in a twittering mass of gray-brown feathers, you've been watching Bushtits.

Bushtits are a little smaller than a chickadee, around four inches in size, with a large head and long tail. They're a very nondescript gray-brown bird with a bit of a brown cap on their head and a tiny bill.

While they mainly feed on insects, including tiny scale insects, beetles, wasps, ants, caterpillars, and spiders, they can also feed on seeds and fruits.

Bushtits are constantly on the move, flitting through the vegetation, near-continuously calling with short *tsip* and *tseep* calls as they go. Often you can hear them long before you see them.



At backyard feeders, they're very partial to suet feeders but can sometimes be found going after peanut halves and hulled sunflower seeds.



During the fall and winter, Bushtits can be very active in backyards as they group up in flocks of 20 or more. They tend to descend en masse upon suet feeders, taking turns in groups of 4 or more, depending on how many can fit at a time.

The rest flit around in nearby shrubs or bushes, waiting their turn. Once the entire flock has finished feeding, or if they get spooked, they'll vanish as quickly as they came.

As spring approaches, Bushtits pair off and establish territories to nest in. The pair tests several nesting sites before making their choice, then builds their sack-like nest. Bushtit nests can often be found hanging from branches beside trails and pathways, so make sure to keep an eye out if you go walking.

IDENTIFYING THE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH IN WINTER



Winter Plumage Male American Goldfinch – R. Harbo

THE MALE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH is a small finch with a small, conical bill and long, notched tail. They're a brilliant yellow overall, with black wings marked with two white wingbars, and a black cap on their head.

During the winter, the male molts into his winter plumage and loses his bright yellow colouration. The new feathers are a duller, unstreaked brown-gray with some yellow in the head and chest. They also lose their black forehead, though they retain the black wings with pale wingbars.



Spring Plumage Male American Goldfinch – J. Morrison



Are You Ready for the Rain?

by Kelsey

While the weather forecast suggests a below average amount of snowfall for us this year, that doesn't mean it's not going to be a wet one! Are you and your bird feeders prepared to handle the rain?

Keeping feeders covered is the first step towards helping keep your seed dry and accessible for your birds. Adding a rain dome or moving the feeder under an eave, or other cover, can keep the rain itself off but we do live in a pretty wet part of the world. Even the air is full of moisture, and a lot of bird seed will soak it *right* up. Seeds out of the shell are especially prone to absorbing moisture.

To keep your seed from sitting wet, put out less at a time. Fill your feeders just enough for the day, and refill with fresh, dry seed the next day. Bird seed just getting wet isn't too much of an issue but we can run into issues like mold if it's allowed to sit wet, resulting in wasted seeds.

Another option is to switch from a hull-less seed to seeds in the shell, like black oil sunflower. The shell acts as a protective barrier that helps the seed hold up better under wet conditions. As a bonus, they're great for caching birds to stash away as emergency food!

We would recommend keeping a closer eye on any bird feeders left out during wet weather, to ensure nothing is left sitting in the rain for too long. Cleaning your feeders more often, and allowing them to fully dry before being refilled, is also an important step is helping your birds stay fed *and* healthy.

If you know the rain is coming, you can also set out a shallow dish in an open area and let the weather fill up the temporary bird bath for you. Make sure to place it somewhere you get a good view, so you and the birds can both enjoy the bath!

14" Swirl Dome

14" polycarbonate dome protects your tube feeder from rain or snow.

Cross-center slotting system fits snugly to all Aspects tube feeders, sitting directly on the feeder cap without any hardware. *Feeder not included.

$49.99 ea.



Feathers Plus Food Equals Staying Warm

by Kelsey

Have you ever been curious just how our tiny local birds manage to make it through the (usually) freezing winters? The key is making sure to keep warm and stay energized.

Most wild birds have an internal temperature that needs to stay around 105°F, even during the colder days. They can do this in a variety of ways, which basically all boil down to maximizing the calories they ingest while minimizing what they expend.

Birds are well aware that the best strategy for cold weather involves keeping themselves out of the chill as much as possible.


M. Hamilton

Feathers are an invaluable evolutionary trait when it comes to helping birds stay warm. Most birds have a base layer of wispy, chaotic down feathers to trap heat and block the wind from reaching their skin. They're especially useful when fluffed up, which creates even more warm air pockets and maximizes their built-in insulation. This is when we see the big round fluffy birds!

Along with their feathers, birds also huddle together to keep warm. Some, like chickadees, juncos, and other smaller species, will squeeze themselves into tree hollows, clean nest boxes, roosting boxes, or even just bunch up together on an evergreen branch to conserve energy and share heat.

Flocking birds tend to group up with birds of the same species, or those with similar dietary needs. Chickadees, for example, often form mixed flocks with nuthatches, and American Goldfinch are often found alongside Pine Siskins.

While feathers and flocking helps the birds keep their bodies warm, what about their very naked legs and feet? Those have got to be *freezing*!

Birds' legs are made primarily from bone and sinew. Their feet are uninsulated, and the blood in them does actually run cold. Their circulatory system, known as a *counter-current system*, puts the blood vessels going to and leaving the feet right next to each other to facilitate a heat exchange.

This means that the blood leaving the body for the feet is cooled, while the blood heading back into the body is warmed up, minimizing heat loss. This also keeps near-freezing blood from entering their body and heart, which risks shocking their system.

Some birds, like the Anna's hummingbird, can also drop their body temperature overnight to conserve energy. This does mean they wake up pretty hungry...but at least they wake up.

Speaking of food, offering high energy snacks like black oil sunflower seeds, peanuts, and high quality suet is the most helpful for our wild birds this time of the year.

Overwintering hummingbirds can also benefit from having early access to sugar water. Getting up early to put an unfrozen feeder back up, or adding a heater to keep it from freezing altogether, can not only bring you enjoyment of watching them visit but can help them survive the cold easier.

References

How Do Birds Survive the Winter - All About Birds
How Do Birds Cope with Cold Winter Weather? - Audubon Magazine
How Birds Get Through the Winter - The Science of Birds
Gimme Shelter: How Do Birds Survive A Snow Storm? - Audubon
How Birds Survive The Cold: Feathers + Food = Warmth - All About Birds
How Weather Affects Birds - CHIRP
How do birds survive in the cold? - Cape & Islands

Mill Creek Suet Cakes

Made in Canada with premium, high quality real beef kidney suet. High in crude protein and fat, they make an excellent wild bird treat all year round.
Available in Peanut, Bug & Nut, and Vegan Nut.



Did You Know?

Hummingbirds' feet actually lock closed when they are in a torpor state so they can't fall off perches? This is why you may sometimes find a bird hanging upside down! They're fine, just hardcore napping.



Limited Space Bird Feeding

by Colin

Keeping Feeders Clean

All bird feeding stations should be kept clean, whether they're contained to a small area or spread across a large backyard.

We recommend a cleaning solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water, kept in a spray bottle for ease of use. Spray feeders liberally, scrub with a stiff brush, and rinse thoroughly.

Cleaning your feeders in the evening, and allowing them to air dry overnight, can be an easy way to keep them clean. Once dry, fill with your preferred seeds and hang back up for the birds to enjoy.

For hummingbird feeders, they should be cleaned and refilled with fresh sugar water a minimum of every 5 to 7 days in cooler weather (under 20°C), or 2 to 3 days when the temperature is above 20°C.

When using a heater during the winter, make sure to change the solution more frequently to account for the extra heat. Avoid using dish soaps, or other soaps that may leave a residue behind in the feeder.

Mat Inserts

Original artwork is printed on a polyester material with a non-slip rubber backing.
Mats measure 30" x 18", and are designed to fit in the Briarwood mat trays or to be used on it's own.

*Black tray not included.

$39.99 ea.





It feels easier to attract birds when you have a sizeable bit of habitat, with lots of trees and feeders all spaced out for your backyard birds to enjoy. It can seem like all that space is required to attract birds, but a large habitat isn't as important as you may believe.

While more birds may visit a larger habitat, that doesn't mean they'll skip over smaller spaces. Backyard (or patio, deck, and balcony) birding is a fun hobby that can be enjoyed by anyone with even a tiny bit of space. Whether you have a large acreage or a tiny balcony attached to your fifth floor apartment, there's a way for you to enjoy the birds.

To attract birds to visit, start with a perch. It can be a small bush, tree, or even a branch strapped to a railing. It doesn't have to be overly large, anything with enough space for a few birds to sit will work just fine.

Adding this perching spot allows birds to scope out any feeders, water features, or other things you have put out for them without feeling at risk out in the open.

For smaller and confined spaces, large or numerous feeders can be impractical. Choosing something small like a patio tray, or even just a shallow plate set out on a table, is really all you need.

If you're putting out bird food, make sure it's nice and visible by placing it at or near the height of an existing railing, and near the edge of any overhang so birds flying past can find it easily. Then, be patient.

Once the first bird discovers the dish, the rest will follow. Then, you can move the feeder to a better location for you to view. We recommend moving in stages if it's going more than a handful of feet, to keep the birds from losing track of it.

When it comes to filling your chosen feeder, less is more. By putting out just enough for the birds to eat in a day, you can cut down on mess left behind. Using a single seed type, such as chipped sunflower, instead of a mix can also help limit mess, spilled seeds, and growing shoots.

Another feeder that works for limited space is a hummingbird feeder, which are usually small and easy to maintain. Window feeders, both for hummingbirds and for seed eating birds, can also provide a great option if you don't have a large area. Plus, they give you the best view of any visiting birds.

Birds that are likely to find your smaller space attractive include chickadees, finches, juncos and other sparrows, Northern Flickers, and hummingbirds.

Rare Birds

by Ivy-Lynne

If you're an avid birder, you've probably heard everything about the Black Vulture spotted in Mayo, Yukon, in early October. Black Vultures have been spotted in Canada before, but it's an *extremely* rare occurrence.

One resident birder from Whitehorse, who made the long drive to the Yukon to see for himself, stated that as far as he was aware the last sighting in the Yukon had been in the 1980s.

This news caused quite the buzz in the birding world, but it's far from the first time this has occurred in Canada. Just a few days after Christmas last December, there was a Taiga Flycatcher (native to Russia) at the Sunset Beach in Vancouver. Before that, in October of 2023, we had a Blue Jay hanging out in North Nanaimo for a while.



K. Fowler

So, how does this happen? How does a bird from *Russia* end up on a Vancouver beach? Birds are pretty well known for their impressive navigational abilities, with some species migrating hundreds of miles, but sometimes the system just fails.

Birds can lose their bearings due to genetic factors, extreme weather, climate change, and a phenomenon known as *mirror image misorientation,* which occurs when birds fly directly opposite the direction they are supposed to go. The distance traveled is usually correct, but their destination is way off.

Climate change can contribute to extreme changes in weather patterns, turning routine, expected weather into something that knocks birds off track.

With global temperatures rising, birds can't rely on seasonal changes to indicate precisely when to migrate. This means that they may leave too early or too late, and can't rely on predictable weather on the journey or at planned layover locations.

Birds that end up straying from their migratory path or native ranges are referred to as 'vagrants' by ornithologists. Typically, vagrant birds are juveniles (Yukon's Black Vulture likely is) and unfortunately do not survive to make a round trip home.

So, what do you do if you spot a rare bird? If you're lucky enough to get a good look, make careful notes about what you see. Mark down the plumage, size, and other distinguishing features of the bird plus where you saw it and when.

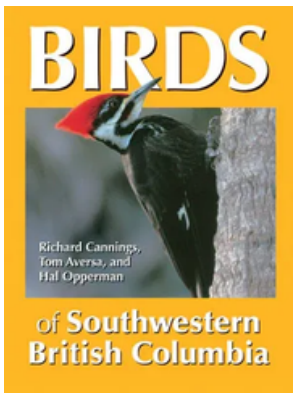
If you're unsure of an ID, reach out to fellow birders who may be able to offer some clarification.

Once you've got a positive ID, or a pretty good idea of one, you can reach out more broadly. Local birding clubs in your area are a great resource, as well as the online Rare Bird Alert, Audubon, and eBird sites, which take notes on rare bird sightings.

There's a good chance, if you reach out, that you will be asked more clarifying questions. Don't be discouraged or upset if they don't legitimize your report. Rare birds are, after all, *rare*.

If you can, take photos to help prove what you've seen. Legitimate organizations aren't going to publicize a sighting that they can't confirm is correct.

If you're interested, get out there and start searching!



Bird of Southwestern British Columbia

A guide to birds of the Lower Mainland, the mid-coast, Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the Sunshine Coast.
Aimed at beginner and intermediate birders, this handy pocket guide is also a great resource for more experienced birders.
This guide tells you how to identify local birds, find out where they live and what they eat, how to attract birds to your yard and how to select a pair of binoculars.

$19.95 ea.

Bird Walks

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) & 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 8:00a.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) and resume in early February.

There is no change for our bird walks, and they are designed to conclude before lunch, averaging around 2 hours. All experience levels are 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 the Nanaimo and Parksville areas.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday - Saturday 9:30 to 5:30

Sunday 12:00 to 4:30

UPCOMING HOLIDAY HOURS

November 11th, *Remembrance Day:* CLOSED

What's Happening in November

Check or replace your hummingbird feeder heater: make sure bulbs work, plug is undamaged, and you know where all the parts are.

Keep an eye out for moisture in your bird feeders and empty if you find any.

It's a good time to clean your mason bee cocoons.

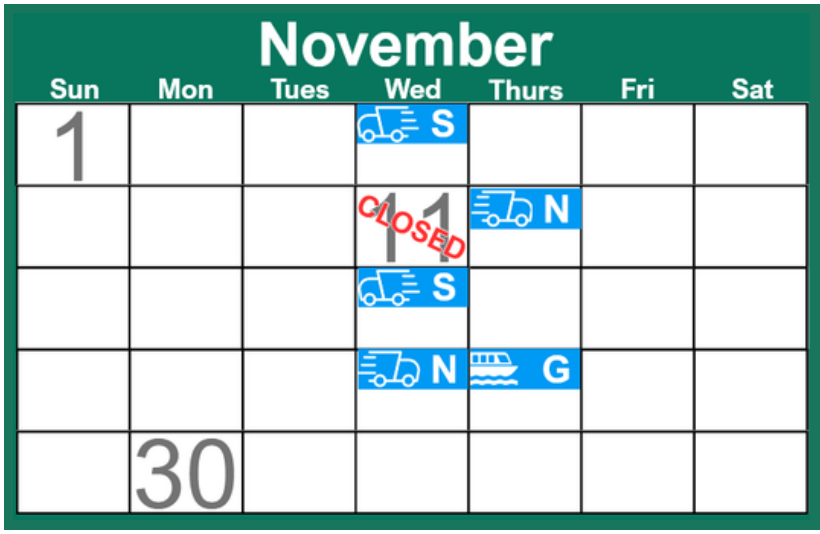
Bring in your solar fountain when the weather starts to get cold to avoid freezing that can cause damage.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR NOVEMBER

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley
November 12th and November 25th

South Nanaimo to Duncan
November 4th and November 18th

Gabriola Island
November 26th



Local Field Naturalist Groups

Nature Nanaimo | Arrowsmith Naturalists | Comox Valley Nature | Cowichan Valley Naturalist Society | Malaspina Naturalists | Rocky Point Bird Observatory | Salt Spring Trail & Nature Club | Victoria Natural History Society | Yellowpoint Ecological Society

CONTACT US

6314 Metral Drive, Nanaimo BC
250-390-3669
1-888-808-BIRD[2473]
info@thebackyard.ca
thebackyard.ca
thebirdstore.blogspot.com

Follow Us: @TheBackyardWildbirdStore
@thebirdstore_nanaimo

