

Bird's Eye View

All Seasons Wild Bird Store

Volume 18 Issue 3 October 2010

A Blizzard of Birds

*Winter irruptions bring
unique northern visitors*



Songbird
Survival
Strategies

Vacation
Plans?

don't forget your birds!

New
Winter Feeders

Winter Bird
Checklist

Chirps

with father/son owners
Al and Dave Netten

Getting Social

I want to express my sincere thanks to all who have "liked" our Facebook page. I can't tell how impressed I am with the amazing photos, videos and comments that are being posted there. If you don't visit our page or haven't "liked" our page yet, I would recommend doing so as there is a wealth of beautiful bird images and information being shared by folks just like you. We are even posting Facebook exclusive coupons once in a while. Be on the lookout for a treat around Halloween.

White Bear Lake Changes

For our White Bear customers, many of you already know that Store Manager Pat Coffey retired recently and has been replaced by the very eager and able Bob Ellis. Bob was promoted from associate manager at our Bloomington store. He's been on the job for a couple of months now and is doing great.

Frequent Feeder Member Days

It was good to see so many of you in the stores during our annual "Member Appreciation Days." It's our opportunity to say "thanks" to you, our very best customers. We hope you enjoyed the extra discount and that your birds are happy and well fed. Our theme this year was seed conservation; we shared some great tips to conserve seed and hopefully a few dollars. It seemed appropriate for the times and is something we can continue to help with when you visit. We truly appreciate your business and are grateful to have survived some tough times. We look forward to much better times ahead. Happy Bird Feeding!



Bird's Eye View is published to share the joy of backyard birds with All Seasons Wild Bird Store's customers. Frequent Feeder Members receive a 10% discount on purchases throughout the year. Photos and articles may be submitted to All Seasons c/o Tami Vogel, PR Director, 816 W. 98th St., Bloomington, MN 55420 or emailed to tvogel@wildbirdstore.net. All Seasons is a family-owned business that is All Things Birds for All Seasons.

Winter Birds to Watch for

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Crow | <input type="checkbox"/> Purple Finch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Goldfinch | <input type="checkbox"/> Red Crossbill* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Robin | <input type="checkbox"/> Red-bellied Woodpecker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Tree Sparrow | <input type="checkbox"/> Red-breasted Nuthatch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black-capped Chickadee | <input type="checkbox"/> Ring-necked Pheasant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay | <input type="checkbox"/> Snow Bunting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brown Creeper | <input type="checkbox"/> Varied Thrush* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Common Redpoll | <input type="checkbox"/> White Crossbill |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dark-eyed Junco | <input type="checkbox"/> White-breasted Nuthatch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Downy Woodpecker | <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Turkey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Bluebird* | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> European House Sparrow | Raptors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evening Grosbeak | <input type="checkbox"/> Bald Eagle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hairy Woodpecker | <input type="checkbox"/> Barred Owl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horned Lark | <input type="checkbox"/> Great Grey Owl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> House Finch | <input type="checkbox"/> Great Horned Owl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mourning Dove | <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Sawwhet Owl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Cardinal | <input type="checkbox"/> Red-tailed Hawk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Flicker* | <input type="checkbox"/> Screech Owl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Shrike | <input type="checkbox"/> Snowy Owl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pileated Woodpecker | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pine Grosbeak* | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pine Siskin | |

*denotes rare visitors to the Twin Cities but sometimes seen, watch our Facebook page for posts.

ON THE COVER

Local photographer Stan Tekiela captures the majesty of a Snowy Owl. For the past several years, a pair of Snowy Owls has over-wintered at the St. Paul/Minneapolis Airport. You can usually spot them on the road near the tunnel by the Federal Express building.

To keep up on other bird sightings and more info, visit our Facebook page.

Preparing for Winter

by Wayzata Manager Melissa Block

Put up a Chickadee roosting house for the upcoming cold winter nights. Chickadees roost together to keep warm in cavities and a roosting box helps our suburban birds. Mount the roosting house where it will get morning sun.



Keep a watch for robins and waxwings feeding on berry trees like Mountain Ash, viburnums and dogwoods. Even bluebirds will stay around through milder winters if they have a fresh water source and berries.

Migrating hummingbirds will continue to visit your feeders into October. Keep your hummingbird feeders up until you don't see any hummers for a week.

Keep Nyjer feeders full. Goldfinches are here all year. Since nesting season is over and they don't need their bright yellow plumage to attract a mate (and the bright colors would now only attract a predator) both the males and females are a dull, greenish-yellow color.

If you want to update or add to your pole system, do it now before the ground freezes.

Consider a heated birdbath for the upcoming winter. Birds that don't ordinarily go to bird feeders, like over-wintering robins will enjoy a water source.

Add some dried mealworms to any seed mix for an extra energy boost.

Juncos are coming! Scatter Finches' Choice, Nyjer or Spectrum on the ground or in a ground

feeder for these winter visitors. White-throated Sparrows, White-Crowned Sparrows and Mourning Doves will enjoy this treat, too.

Watching birds at a window feeder is great fun on a cold winter day. There are many different styles to choose from. Birds love the shelled sunflower seed in Kracker Jax or Medium Chips in a window feeder. And there's no shell mess!

Read up on winter migrants so you can easily identify new birds in your yard and at your feeders. A good start is the Winter Irruption article on pages 5-6 of this issue.

Give your feeders a good cleaning before winter. You can use a solution of one part bleach to 10 parts hot water or a mild solution of unscented dish detergent. Feeders should be cleaned inside and out, including all feeding ports, perches, lids and platforms. (We offer bird feeder cleaning services if you'd rather have us do it!)

Create a brush pile in one corner of your yard for the birds. They can use this as shelter from the weather and to hide from predators when the leaves are gone from the trees.

Don't cut the seed heads from your perennials. Birds will eat these seeds throughout the winter. Particularly valuable are Purple Coneflower, Black-Eyed Susan, Sunflower and Hollyhock.



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(in Westwind Plaza)
Minnetonka, MN 55345
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White Bear Lake
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This paper contains 30% post-consumer waste. Inks are environmentally friendly and are properly cleaned and recycled.





Hoary Redpoll
by Dan Tallman

All of the sudden the snow is covered with little red-brown birds. Where did they come from? Maybe you found yourself asking that question in the cold early months of 2009. The winter of 2008-09 saw the movement of redpolls into many northern parts of the United States, a phenomenon known as an irruption. Another recent irruption you may remember was the Great Gray Owl movement into Minnesota that took place five winters ago. Irruptions

Redpolls, the star of our most recent irruption here in the Twin Cities, are often grouped with other birds that share this irruptive behavior: Common and Hoary redpolls, Pine Siskins, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches, goldfinches and even Blue Jays, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Bohemian Waxwings are lumped together because they all share this irruptive behavior.

The redpolls, siskins, and the red-breasted nuthatch seem to be the three most likely to appear in backyards in our area. Many of these birds will enjoy feeding at or beneath your Nyjer feeder. Don't be afraid to put Nyjer or something like our Finches' Choice in a ground tray or fly through feeder. Those little finches have no qualms about feeding on the ground and your juncos and wintering migratory sparrows will enjoy the treat as well.

American Goldfinches are another species that can also irrupt but in a different way than the typical winter finches. We do see goldfinches year-round in the Twin Cities. Those that nest in central and southern Minnesota will be permanent residents or migrate only short distances while those nesting in northern Minnesota migrate south toward us in winter. What

can classify these birds as an irruptive species is that large flocks can form in winter that can become quite nomadic in search of food. They may wander throughout the season from food source to food source or congregate in one area where they find abundant supplies of seeds. This is why I make sure to offer Nyjer seed year-round. I want the flock to irrupt to my neighborhood!

Less often seen in backyards, owl irruptions nonetheless can make for spectacular winter birding. Great Gray Owls, Snowy Owls and Northern Hawk Owls often irrupt into northern and central Minnesota and sometimes even all the way down to the Twin Cities. We see a few Snowy Owls that migrate here each winter, but in an irruption year the numbers can be much, much

larger. The most recent Great Gray Owl irruption in the winter of 2005 was unprecedented in size, possibly 10 times larger than any previously on record.

As with finches, it is the availability of food that drives these birds out of their normal ranges. Many of the small rodents the owls typically feed on, voles and lemmings for example, can go through population crashes. A heavy, deep snow cover can be just as bad for the owls as it severely limits their hunting success. Often large numbers of owls will congregate in a relatively small area because of the right combination of high prey populations and snow cover that does not limit their hunting success.

The irregular nature of these irruptions makes them hard to predict. Redpolls seem to irrupt every other year but because of many variables such as direction and breeding location of the irrupting birds it is not a given that we will see as many this winter as we did two winters ago. Lemming populations crash about every four years so the owls may be more likely to irrupt in those years. However, the lemmings are not an owl's only food source and high populations of voles and mice can provide enough prey to keep the owls from moving out of their boreal forest home. We seem to have had a small irruption of owls last winter, nothing like the enormous irruption five years ago. Given the four-year cycle estimate we may not see a large owl movement into Minnesota this winter.

If you want to keep abreast of any potential movements as they unfold a great resource is the MOU-net listing maintained by the Minnesota Ornithologists Union at moumn.org. Ron Pittaway of the Ontario Field Ornithologists (www.ofo.ca) prepares a detailed report each fall of boreal seed and cone crop abundance and makes predictions as to what species



Evening Grosbeak

can be very exciting to backyard bird feeders, both because of their unpredictable nature and because they can bring a large number of birds flocking to feeders that we may not otherwise see.

What is an irruption and what makes it different than seasonal migration? Irruptions are not the same behavior as seasonal migration. An irruption does not occur regularly but is driven by a lack of food in a bird's typical range. Many years there is plenty to eat and the birds stay put. Other years there can be a shortage of one or more types of seed and cone crops in the boreal forests, prompting the birds to range farther in search of food.

Finch irruptions may affect one species or many, and may not occur equally, or at all, over a bird's range. If the birch seed crop in eastern Canada fails but the crop in the rest of Canada does not, siskins in eastern Canada will probably irrupt while those elsewhere will not. Even more interesting is that those siskins forced to move in search of food do not always go south, some or all of them may wander west to where the seeds are more abundant. Failures of different food sources lead to different birds being forced to move. Redpoll and finch irruptions coincide with tree and weed seed crops whereas the crossbills are tied to cone crops. If a number of species is affected over a wide area the irruption is sometimes termed a "superflight" and we may find our feeders swarming with large numbers of visitors from the north.



Northern Hawk Owl

may irrupt. This year he's predicting redpolls will irrupt into our area but Pine Siskins may head west to an abundant cone crop in the Yukon. What will happen? Watch our Facebook page for posts!

We've all heard the expression "raining cats and dogs" but each winter many of us look forward to the possibility that we will have a "blizzard of birds."

Songbird Survival Strategies

by Minnetonka Carol Chenault

Survival of the Unseen

For a backyard songbird, avoiding predators begins with not being seen in the first place.

The coloration of most birds helps them blend with their surroundings. Disruptive coloration such as patches, streaks and other bold patterns function like military camouflage by distracting the predator from seeing the bird as a whole. Light and dark eyelines disguise the bird's eye. Countershading, darker plumage on top and lighter underneath, helps to hide the bird in flight.

Certain songbirds are hard to detect in bright sunlight because when illuminated by the sun their darker backs harmonize with their shaded white under-parts and appear as a single color.

When danger is near birds can freeze in one spot. They have an amazing ability to perch or stand without twitching a muscle or blinking an eye thereby hiding in plain sight.

Warning Signs

Some birds such as Killdeer will feign injury to lure a predator away from eggs or offspring.

Some birds use an early warning system to announce the presence of a predator long before it is close enough to be a threat.

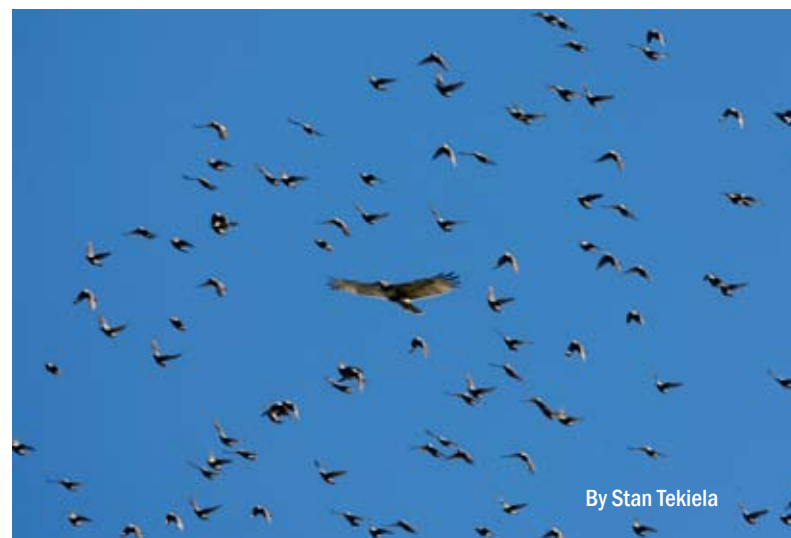
There truly is safety in numbers, too. Flocking together makes spotting predators easier: The more birds, the more eyes and ears.

Some species, including chickadees, jays and crows, post sentinels to be on the watch

for predators. These birds have a social system in which individuals take turns perching in a prominent location to spot danger and to give a special warning call. Often the subordinate members of a flock are assigned this risky business.

Some songbirds give a low pitched "chink" sound to indicate danger on the ground- such as a snake, while a high pitched "seet" call identifies danger from above, like a Cooper's hawk.

The "chick-a-dee-dee" call of the Black-capped Chickadee when given in the presence of a predator tells other birds the relative size and the potential danger posed by a predator.



Above: a flock of starlings mobs a Red-tail Hawk in an effort to keep it away from nesting sites. Left: flocking creates safety in numbers and flocking in shrubs or brush piles offers the extra benefit of foliage protection.

Chickadees, like many cavity nesting birds, can scare off predators by mimicking snakes! They will hiss like a snake, open their mouths wide and sway back and forth, even thump the sides of the nesting hole to frighten away squirrels and raccoons.

Angry Mob

Some songbirds employ a behavior known as "mobbing" after locating a winged predator,

like a hawk or an owl. They'll not only make alarm calls, but they'll continually swoop at the predator until they drive it away. All this activity alerts other members of the flock to the owl's presence and distracts the predator from nearby nests.

There is even a theory that mobbing may serve to attract another, larger predator to threaten the first.

When threatened, flocking birds such as starlings and blackbirds tighten their flock formation to form a dense mass that weaves in all directions. This behavior makes it harder for predators to isolate and capture a single bird.

Ducks on a pond will also form a compact group when a hawk or eagle flies overhead.

An isolated bird under attack by any type of flighted predator such as a Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrel or a Cooper's Hawk will dive for thick cover in dense bushes.

Although it is not easy to watch a hawk prey on a songbird in your yard, predators are a necessary part of the ecosystem in your habitat. Raptors are generally successful in only about a third of their attacks. They enhance their success by targeting the weakest, slowest members of a flock, thereby ensuring the overall health of the flock as the stronger members are left to reproduce.

How You Can Help

Provide bushes and trees or even a brush pile in your backyard for cover.

Do your part to eliminate predators. Keeping cats indoors safeguards your feathered friends. Cats left to wander outside are a much greater threat to birds than are hawks. Placing feeders out of pouncing distance from a bush or other hiding place, and at least five feet off the ground will help protect birds from neighborhood and feral cats. Try a "super soaker" water squirt gun to repel unwanted cats from your yard.

Your backyard songbirds are amazing, resourceful creatures! Feeding birds in the backyard and providing them with a safe habitat brings them in close enough for you to enjoy their most interesting behaviors.

New Feeders for Winter



The best of both worlds! This stainless steel feeder can be used for either peanut pieces or for oilers. The tray is optional and easily attached. Lifetime manufacturer's warranty against defects.

Suet and seed all in one convenient location! Made from recycled materials, this feeder is in the new Green Solutions line which also includes a Nyjer feeder, tray feeder and two different hopper feeders.



Sure to be a new favorite with finch lovers is this new 3-qt. mesh Nyjer feeder constructed of recycled poly-lumber. This feeder is part of the new Green Solutions line and carries a manufacturer's lifetime warranty against defects.

A great feeder for all your winter finches!

Just because you're a snowbird Doesn't mean your birds are.

Leaving town or just want to stay out of the cold? Help your winter birds by keeping your seed fresh and your feeders full. Let us keep your feeders and heated bird baths topped off for you. Schedule regular visits or just give us a call when you need us. We'll use the seed you already have or we can bring whatever you need. One phone call is all it takes!

Cost is just \$7.50/15 minutes, plus a flat \$8.95 trip fee (most yards can be done in 15 minutes - we're efficient!). Number of visits will be determined when you call in your request.

Call our Wayzata store: 952.473.4283



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