



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Volume 23 Issue 1 | January/February 2016

**ALL SEASONS
WILD BIRD
STORE**

An Unconventional Woodpecker:

Northern Flicker

+ **“Bird Brain”: A Compliment?
Serving Suet Pellets**



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BLOOMINGTON
816 West 98th St.
(Clover Center)
Bloomington, MN 55420
952.884.4103

EAGAN
2143 Cliff Rd.
(Cedar Cliff Shopping Center)
Eagan, MN 55122
651.459.0084

MINNETONKA
4759 County Rd. 101
(Westwind Plaza)
Minnetonka, MN 55345
952.935.5892

WHITE BEAR LAKE
2703 East Cty. Hwy. E.
(Cty. Rd. E. and Hwy. 120)
White Bear Lake, MN 55110
651.653.8705

WAYZATA & WILD BIRD DELIVERS
15710 Wayzata Blvd.
(394 Frontage Rd.)
Wayzata, MN 55391
952.473.4283

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Bird's-Eye View is published to share the joy of backyard birds with All Seasons Wild Bird Store's customers and friends.

BIRD INTELLIGENCE

Brainy Birds

By Wayzata Manager MELISSA BLOCK

Being Called a “Bird Brain” is a Good Thing!

Brain size alone is not always a good gauge of intelligence. Yes, birds have small brains, but they have a proportionally large brain compared to their head and body size. Studies have shown that the structure of the bird brain is different than the mammal brain. Birds have a higher degree of connectivity between brain sections. The best indication of bird intelligence, though, is through observation of bird activity.



Memory

Many birds, especially woodpeckers and jays, save and hide food to eat later. In one study, jays were able to find seeds almost a year after they hid them. In fact, they showed an amazing ability to remember hundreds of their hiding spots. This is an example of planning for the future. Some birds have shown the ability to memorize. Hummingbirds remember which flowers in a garden produce the most nectar and will return to those specific flowers year after year.



See an amazing BBC Two video of a crow using tools: wildbirdstore.com/2015/12/crow-using-tool-experiment/

Dexterity & Problem Solving

Tool use is found in some bird species. For example, shrikes don't have the strong talons of raptors so they use tree thorns to impale their prey. Herons use bread as bait to fish. And crows and ravens use twigs to get to bugs in tree bark. Birds also source a variety of materials to build very intricate nests, including twigs, plant fibers, hair, spider webs, lichen and mud. Some nests have hidden entrances or even dummy entrances.

Working Together

Some birds work together in a way that demonstrates an understanding of the concept

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Celebrating a Quarter Century in Business!



Welcome to 2016, another milestone year for our family business. In April, we will celebrate our 25th anniversary. It's hard to imagine that we've been at this for almost

a quarter century! Time flies.

Looking back over the years, many things in our world have changed, but not in how and why people feed wild birds. Bird feeders haven't changed too much, with the exception of some entertaining squirrel-resistant models. Bird foods haven't changed a lot either, except for having more non-traditional food choices like live or dried mealworms or an insect-infused suet cake.

People continue to feed birds for the joy it brings them . . . it simply feels good to have a relationship with nature. Birds are interesting and beautiful, and fortunately quite easy to attract. We are extremely grateful for the 25-year run we're on. We owe all of it to our very loyal and caring customers. Thank you.

~Dave Netten



Worry-Free Guarantee!

We want our customers to have a worry-free experience with every purchase. If you're not completely satisfied with *any item* purchased from our store, simply return it to us for an exchange or refund.

No worries . . . ever!

Join the conversation online!



Visit our Facebook page to post photos, ask questions and be the first to know about upcoming sales and events.

JAN.
&
FEB.

Mid Winter

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT



- Provide foods loaded with fat and protein—like suet, suet pellets, peanuts and sunflower out of the shell—to help birds refuel quickly.**
- Call the Wayzata store to arrange our **Vacation Feed and Fill** service to keep your feeders stocked while you're out of town.
- Provide a clean, heated water source.
- Keep an eye out for overwintering populations of Bald Eagles, Mourning Doves, American Robins, Northern Flickers and Eastern Bluebirds.
- Scatter **Critter Crunch** on the ground, on a tree stump, or place it in a screened-bottom ground feeder for over-wintering Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, Northern Cardinals, pheasants and Wild Turkeys.
- Take note: Great Horned Owls, our earliest nesting birds, are on the nest in mid-January.
- Stock feeders with **Nyjer™ and Chips** for goldfinches and visiting finches. Nomadic mixed foraging flocks will be abundant one day and scarce the next.
- Look to the open water of marinas and rivers to observe Bald Eagles. They begin nest-building in February.
- Pick up a copy of *Birds of Minnesota State Parks* to plan your next Minnesota birding trip.**
- Keep watch in early February for returning Horned Larks, our first spring migrants, followed by Wood Ducks, Red-winged Blackbirds, grackles, American Robins and Canada Geese in the last days of the month.
- Listen for hooting owls, drumming woodpeckers and bird calls like the “fee-bee” of chickadees when bird sounds increase in January and February.
- Send your bird photos to info@wildbirdstore.net to be displayed on our digital sign in the stores or on our Facebook page.**
- Watch for winter-visiting Pine Siskins, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches and irruptive species like Red Polls and Great Gray and Snowy Owls.
- Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count February 12–15. See gbbc.birdcount.org for more information.
- Observe American Goldfinches for signs of molting.
- Check out our blog at wildbirdstore.com/blog for timely tips and news.



The Northern Flicker is the non-conformist of Minnesota's woodpecker scene.

It's the only brown-backed species of woodpecker, for starters, and it sports an unusual, slightly curved bill that makes it easier to dig in the *ground* for food, versus trees. Its penchant for horizontal hunting is reflected in its un-woodpecker-like habit of perching atop branches, versus clinging to the side of trees. And, while most of our native woodpeckers wait out the winter in Minnesota, many Northern Flickers move with the migrating masses as the autumn days grow shorter.



Flickers perch unlike other woodpeckers.

Yet, lest you begin to believe this dapper driller holds nothing in common with its cousins Hairy and Downy, consider that the Northern Flicker pecks holes in rotting trees for nests, communicates by drumming and wears a touch of red—males, at least—in manners consistent with your typical Minnesota woodpecker.

Read on for some basics—and beyond—about the Northern Flicker.



A Northern Flicker excavates a nest hole. (Yellow-shafted subspecies, male)

One Species, Two Varieties

All Northern Flickers are distinguished by their brown backs and wings with fine black bar patterns, a white rump patch, a gray crown, a buff-colored breast with black spots and a black chest patch.

If you're in the west, the Northern Flickers you see are likely to have reddish undersides (Red-shafted subspecies), while we northern folks and our eastern neighbors are likely to see flickers with yellowish undersides (Yellow-shafted subspecies). The Red-shafted male has a red mustache and no marking at the base of the neck, while the Yellow-shafted male has a black mustache and a red crescent at the nape of the neck.



The Red-shafted subspecies of Northern Flicker has reddish undersides and the male (above) has a red mustache.



The Yellow-shafted subspecies has yellowish undersides and the male (above) has a black mustache and red at the nape of neck.



Courtship and Nesting

Though you may not be able to recall the sound of the Northern Flicker, you'd likely recognize its *wik-wik-wik-wik-wik!* call as a common part of spring's soundtrack. Look up as you hear the call and you'll likely see the

male flicker backing up his vocal display with a prominent perch.

Flickers excavate cavities to nest in trees with dead heartwood (or nestboxes filled to the top with white pine wood chips). The male and female share incubation duties—usually 5-8 white glossy eggs—and young fledge in 28 days.

Habitat and Diet

Northern Flickers frequent farm groves, orchards, open forest, woodlots and urban areas. They forage for ants and beetles

in grassy meadows and backyards—my son even spotted one foraging in Grant Park in downtown Chicago!

Once counted as one of the four most plentiful backyard birds in Minnesota, a 2009 U.S. Fish and Wildlife breeding bird survey reported that Northern Flickers have declined about 4.9% per year during the past two decades, likely due to both the removal of dead trees and the heavy use of lawn chemicals that deplete natural insect food sources.

Aside from insects, Northern Flickers may eat the occasional suet, fruits and seeds and enjoy sipping water from heated birdbaths.

Migration

The range of Northern Flickers spreads across the United States and into Canada during nesting months, with migration south by way of the Mississippi or Atlantic flyways in the winter.

Some Northern Flickers may overwinter, surviving in part on suet from birdfeeders and water from heated birdbaths. ■



A research paper describes social foraging behavior in Red-backed Hawks.

of mutual benefit. Hawks flush out prey for other hawks to catch. Crows form groups to mob predators, like hawks and owls. Chickadees and nuthatches give warning calls to warn others of the presence of a predator.

Communication

Mockingbirds are known to learn and mimic foreign noises. They study and deliver the songs of shrikes, blackbirds, killdeer, jays, hawks and even some frog sounds. Gray Catbirds can mimic a whole host of different species as well.

Jays have the ability to mimic the call of hawks, especially the Red-shouldered Hawk. Recently, I was positive I had heard a hawk in my front yard. It seemed so close. I followed the sound and finally found a Blue Jay sitting in a spruce tree calling out like a hawk. It scattered all the other birds, then the Blue Jay swooped in and took over the feeders!

So if someone calls you a “bird brain” take it as a compliment! ■



A Blue Jay mimicked the sound of a hawk to gain free reign of the bird feeders!

FEATURED PRODUCTS

Snacks 'n' Treats Feeder
A Favorite Feeder of Perching Birds

The Snacks 'N' Treats Feeder has a divided tray to hold suet pellets in one section and birdseed or dried mealworms in the other. The weather guard cover can be lowered to keep food dry and prevent large birds from accessing the food. This feeder holds 1.2 pounds of food, and is easy to disassemble and clean. The blue food tray has built-in drainage holes to keep the food dry and fresh. The Snack 'N' Treats Feeder is a favorite of cardinals, bluebirds, chickadees and other perching birds.



The Snacks 'n' Treats feeder accommodates a variety of food types, like seed, suet pellets and mealworms.

Suet Pellets

High-Energy Fuel for Winter Birds

Think of this as suet to go! Suet pellets are a great high-energy food source, full of protein and fat. They are made of vegetable fat, wheat and peanut flour and mealworms. Suet pellets are an easy, no-mess way to provide suet. Serve suet pellets alone or mixed in with your seed. Bluebirds, woodpeckers, cardinals, chickadees and others love suet pellets! ■



Mix high-energy suet pellets with seed in your feeders, or serve it alone.

FREE NATIVE PLANT GUIDE

The winter months are the perfect time to start dreaming about your summer garden!

To help you plan bird-friendly selections for your yard, the St. Paul Audubon Society, Audubon Minnesota, Out Back Nursery and Landscaping, and Wild Ones—Oak Savanna & Twin Cities Chapters—created a free, downloadable guide to insect-attracting native plants for Central Minnesota.

The booklet's authors point out that “our gardens and landscapes now are vitally important to preserving and sustaining nature’s diversity—birds, bees, butterflies and others” and that native plants have an important role in our backyards as a food source for insects, which, in turn, nurture birds.

The booklet highlights native trees, shrubs, flowering plants and grasses that are all-star insect attractants. You can download the booklet from saintpaulaudubon.org or from our Landscaping for Birds web page: wildbirdstore.com/landscaping-for-birds/



Have an idea for a future issue of Birds-Eye View? Photos and articles may be submitted by email to info@wildbirdstore.net. Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter at WildBirdStore.com to receive information about backyard birding, store events and exclusive discounts.