



**ALL SEASONS
WILD BIRD
STORE**

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Volume 26 Issue 1 | January/February 2019

BIRD FEATHERS:

Why White?

+ Experienced Experts, New Insights
Seasonal Notes

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EAGAN

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Minnetonka, MN 55345
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WHITE BEAR LAKE

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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.

WINTER BIRDWATCHING

By Guest Contributor **MELISSA BLOCK**

The Sunny Side of Winter

Winter can seem dark and lifeless, but it is full of wonderful things to see and is a great time for birdwatching! It's so much easier to view birds when the leaves are off the trees and with a background of white snow.

Stay Warm: Attract Birds To Your Window

Sit back and watch the birds from inside your warm house by putting up a **window feeder**. Place it in a window with good visibility and where it'll be easy to fill. Give it a few days and birds will come flocking. I use **Medium Sunflower Chips** or **Kracker Jax** to prevent shell mess from accumulating under the window. I've seen cardinals, nuthatches, goldfinches, chickadees, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, redpolls, and Pine Siskins at my window feeder. Add a heated birdbath where you can see it and you'll have all sorts of activity all day long.

Investigate Tracks Outdoors

When it's "warm" enough so that it doesn't actually hurt to go outside, a walk around your yard can provide you with lots of clues to who's been around. I love to look at the footprints and



tracks the outdoor critters have made in the snow. I once found a print that looked like an owl's wings brushing the snow as it took its prey. It's fun to take a photo of the prints and then try to identify who made them.

Snow prints are especially interesting around any brush piles in your yard. We have a couple of brush piles in our yard and there is a lot of activity around them: bird tracks, rabbit, squirrel, and deer tracks surround the brush piles.

I've used a couple of websites to figure out some of the tracks. Visit naturetracking.com, or blog.nwf.org and search for "tracks". You can also get a book with identifying photos.

Listen in the Evenings

Another activity is to listen to the sounds of birds outside in the evening. Great Horned Owls have already started incubating their eggs and will often call to each other after dark. Barred Owls are calling each other, looking for mates. Their calls in the dark, cold winter sound almost eerie.

A Final Benefit of Winter Birdwatching

Look on the positive side—there are no mosquitos to interfere with your enjoyment of the birds in your backyard! ■

Jim Gilbert Retires

Phenology Writer & Naturalist



It is with great respect, admiration and some regret that we report to you that Jim Gilbert will no longer be writing our monthly phenology. Jim has been retired for

several years and recently informed us that the burden of writing for us every month is becoming too great in his new lifestyle.

Our relationship with Jim began in 1991 when we first got into the business and began sponsoring Jim Gilbert's Nature Notes show on WCCO. Jim has been an important part of our lives ever since and we owe much of our success to his loyal listeners.

Jim is an accomplished biologist and naturalist and has a great way of sharing his natural knowledge and observations to those of us interested in such things.

I know our customers will share in our disappointment that Jim won't be writing for us any longer, but I also know that we, along with you, wish him the very best. We've been honored to be able to work with him for so long and there will never be another naturalist who does it the way Jim does. Take good care, friend.

~Dave Netten



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"Old Dogs," New Tricks

Our expert staff members have been feeding birds for years, yet we learned some new things in our backyards this year. Take what you want from their insights to apply to your bird feeding in the new year!

I began using Songbird Delight in a large tray feeder. Less mess and the birds love it!
-Sue



Multiple hummingbird feeders located on different sides of the house attracted more hummingbirds and reduced the fighting and territorial behavior.

-Kathy



Rain guards work!
Hummingbirds fed more often and for longer periods on a nectar feeder sheltered under a rain guard.

-Carol

The tail prop style suet feeders really do bring in the larger woodpeckers.
-Kathy



To feed on a short pole without a baffle, the compressed seed cylinders like Flaming Hot Feast or Golden Safflower kept the squirrels and deer from eating the seed. Insect and Hot Pepper suet even attracted bluebirds while keeping the squirrels at bay.
-Carol



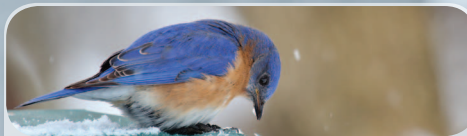
Scattering Finches' Choice on the ground has been a delightful change for me. I'm enjoying the Dark-eyed Juncos and native sparrows feeding in my yard.

-Kathy



Weather plays a big part in the activities of the backyard. With the late spring snows the White Bear Lake store did not have nesting bluebirds on the property. However, many customers had successful bluebird broods but nesting started later in the season.

-Julie



Why White?

Inspired by January's snowy palette and an abundance of white sales at department stores, I got to thinking about white as it pertains to coloration in birds. I discovered that white feathers serve different purposes, depending on the environment in which the species dwells or the simple luck of a genetic draw.

Why Some Feathers Are White

White feathers are the result of a lack of pigmentation. Pigments selectively reflect and absorb different wavelengths of light, leading to the perception of color. Without pigments, all wavelengths are reflected and the color we see is white.

Sources of pigmentation include melanin, carotenoids and porphyrines. Melanin has the additional property of providing strength and durability to feathers. Therefore, feathers without melanin are subject to more wear and tear. It's common for mostly white birds to have black feather tips on flight feathers, prolonging their utility.

White Bird Species: Stand Out or Blend In



White feathers are high contrast against water.

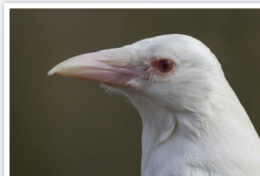
and to potentially lead them to hard-to-find food sources.

In a snowy arctic environment, both predators (ie. Snowy Owls) and prey (i.e. ptarmigans) rely on white coloration as camouflage to improve their chances of survival. Ptarmigans molt to a less conspicuous brown plumage in the summer months.

Unexpectedly White Birds

Occasionally a bird may catch your eye because it is unexpectedly white or has abnormal patches of white. This may be due to albinism or leucism.

Albinism is a genetic mutation that disrupts melanin production. Albino birds have pink eyes, because the only color in the eyes comes from light reflected from blood vessels. Albino birds may have other pigments, like carotenoids and porphyrines, present, allowing them to have some color.



Albino birds have pink eyes due to a lack of melanin.

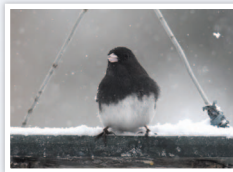
Leucism is the result of a flaw in how pigment deposits in feathers. Leucistic birds may appear completely white or have abnormal patches of white. Unlike albino birds, leucistic birds have dark eyes. Leucism is common in Canada Geese, crows, chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, grackles and House Sparrows—though it may occur in other bird species as well.



This House Finch is leucistic—notice the black eyes.



This Common Grackle is partially leucistic.



Juncos are an example of countershading.

Birds with Some White

Some bird species rely on visual tricks from partially white coloration to appear inconspicuous to predators. In birds that exhibit **countershading**, such as Dark-eyed Juncos, their bellies may be pure white, gradually becoming

darker along their backs. In general, countershading helps the bird blend into the dark ground when viewed by predators from above, and blend into the light sky when viewed from below.

Other birds, like many woodpeckers, rely on white feathers to create patterns that break up the outline of their body shape and make them more difficult to see against a light-dappled forest background. This is called **disruptive coloration**. ■



White breaks up the outline of a Red-bellied Woodpecker's body.

January & February

SEASONAL NOTES

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

January

- ❑ Use large-capacity feeders to reduce the frequency of trips out in the snow and cold to fill feeders. For loose seed, use feeders like the **Quick Clean Big Tube**, **Sky Café**, **Squirrel Buster Plus**, or a large hopper feeder.
- ❑ The **Hanging Seed Cylinder feeder** holds up to a **72oz Wild Bird Feast seed cylinder** (shown). Seed cylinders prevent birds from “bill sweeping” the seed onto the ground and deer from licking seed out of the feeder. A plus—Northern Cardinals love this feeder!
- ❑ Blue Jays love **in-the-shell peanuts**, as do Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Hang a **wreath peanut feeder** and watch the fun as they pull peanuts out of the wire coil.



The clear dome serves as a weather guard. The powder-coated leaf ring and base provide perching spots.

- ❑ Deter squirrels with a **Flaming Hot Feast seed cylinder** (shown), **hot pepper suet cakes** or **plugs** or by adding **Flaming Squirrel Seed Sauce** or **Fire Hot Powder Mix** to seed.



- ❑ Birds must refuel quickly during cold weather. The **Quick Clean Peanut Mesh feeder** filled with a combination of dried mealworms, suet pellets, peanut pick-outs and medium sunflower chips attracts chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers galore!
- ❑ Suet is a must during the winter. The **recycled double suet feeder** has an extended “tail prop” that provides better leverage for woodpeckers. The **birch log suet plug feeder** accommodates woodpeckers large and small with enough length for tail propping. Fill with suet plugs: unwrap the plugs and microwave them for 5 seconds, then pack the

softened plugs into the holes of the feeder.

- ❑ Provide a clean water source with a heated birdbath. Use **Birdbath Protector** in it to keep the bath clean and fresh. Refill your **heated birdbath** with cold water to reduce evaporation.
- ❑ Scatter **Critter Crunch** (shown) on the ground, on a tree stump or in a screened-bottom ground feeder for over-wintering Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, cardinals, pheasants and Wild Turkeys.
- ❑ Provide **Nyjer and Chips** or **Finches' Choice** for goldfinches, Pine Siskins, House Finches and Dark-eyed Juncos. Nomadic mixed foraging flocks will be abundant one day and scarce the next.
- ❑ Send your bird photos to be used on our digital sign in the stores or on our Facebook page: carol@wildbirdstore.net

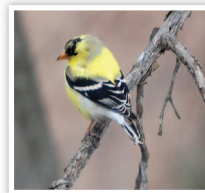


February

- ❑ Arrange for our **Vacation Feed-and-Fill service** to keep your feeders stocked while you are out of town. If you're staying in town but don't want to venture out, our **Home Delivery service** will deliver seed to your door. Call the Wayzata store at 952-473-4283 to sign up.
- ❑ Bring birds right up to the window for great viewing and to entertain your cats and dogs! The **Going Green Recycled Plastic Window Feeder** (shown) is made in the USA and is easy to fill and clean. It secures to the window with four suction cups and is made of 90% recycled material. The powder-coated metal tray drains water away, keeping seed fresh.



- ❑ American Goldfinches are beginning to molt into their bright yellow feathers. A sure sign of returning spring—eventually!
- ❑ Provide foods loaded with fat and protein like **mealworms**, **suet**, **suet pellets**, **peanuts** and **out-of-the-shell sunflower** to help birds refuel quickly during cold weather. Add **suet pellets** and **dried mealworms** to **Kracker Jax** for a full buffet.
- ❑ Starlings may visit backyards year round. Keep them out of your suet with an **upside-down suet log feeder** or **recycled upside-down suet cake feeder**.
- ❑ All Minnesota species of tree squirrels begin their mating season including flying, fox, gray and red squirrels.



- ❑ Horned Larks (shown), the first spring migrants, arrive in early February followed by American Crows, Wood Ducks, Red-winged Blackbirds, Grackles, American Robins and Canada Geese in the last days of the month.



- ❑ Eastern Chipmunks may be active out of their burrows.
- ❑ Some winter visitors begin their northward retreat but many Dark-eyed Juncos remain until early spring. They love **Finches' Choice** sprinkled on the ground or served in a **Nyjer™ tube** or **mesh feeder**.
- ❑ Participate in the **Great Backyard Bird Count**. See gbbc.birdcount.org for more information.



Have an idea for a future issue of *Birds-Eye View*? Photos and articles may be submitted by email to info@wildbirdstore.net.
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