

25<sup>th</sup>

ALL SEASONS  
WILD BIRD  
STORE

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS!

# BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Volume 24 Issue 2 | March/April 2017

THE WONDER OF

## Feathers

Bats

Seasonal Checklist

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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.

#### BACKYARD HELPERS

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

## *Get Acquainted with Bats*

Bats are natural allies in insect control. A single brown bat can eat up to 7,000 mosquitoes per night! Here's more about Minnesota's winged mammals.

#### The Only Mammals with the Gift of Flight

Bats are mammals of the order *Chiroptera* whose forelimbs form webbed wings, making them the only mammals naturally capable of powered and sustained flight. Minnesota has been known to have seven species of resident bats with an eighth species usually found in Iowa but recently seen in Minnesota. Our most common bats are the Little Brown Bat and the Big Brown Bat. Bats are quite small creatures weighing two tenths of an ounce to just over one ounce.



A Big Brown Bat.

#### Natural Pest Controllers

As insectivores, bats eat large numbers of night-flying moths, beetles, mosquitoes and other flying bugs and insects. They use their cupped tail to catch insects as they dart and dodge through the air. The prey is then transferred to the bat's mouth while the bat is still in flight.

#### Sound Navigators

Bats locate insects and avoid hitting obstacles by means of echo location. As they fly, bats are constantly emitting supersonic cries which humans cannot hear. The sound bounces off prey and objects, echoing back to the bat's ears. According to the MN DNR, understanding the principle of bat echo location led to the development of sonar and radar by which boats and planes navigate and by which fishermen locate schools of fish.

#### Life Cycle

Bats give birth in the spring and 3–4 weeks later the young can fly. In the summer, bats roost in bat houses, caves, mines, hollow trees and buildings. Some species of bats live 30 years or more and will come back to the same roosting spot year after year.

Some Minnesota bats migrate in the winter while others hibernate in caves, hollow trees and buildings. For information on installing bat houses, visit: [wildbirdstore.com/resources/troubleshooting-pests/encouraging-bats](http://wildbirdstore.com/resources/troubleshooting-pests/encouraging-bats). ■



## The Dynamics of Retail And Why We're Suddenly Trendy

Retail businesses, along with much of the rest of the world, seem to be in a state of flux. What was once true, may not be any longer, and the cycles or relevance seem to be getting shorter and shorter. I just heard that Warren Buffet, investor extraordinaire, just dumped all of his Walmart stock. Walmart just happens to be the largest company in the world. He clearly sees a change coming. It seems we're exiting the era of the "big box" store and entering a new era of online, omnichannel and smaller, more focused bricks and mortar stores.

Since we're primarily a brick and mortar business and we're small, we're paying attention. What we've learned is that convenience and an easy, time-saving shopping experience are enticing more customers to shop in smaller stores. The smaller stores offer more curated selections (often local products) and an overall better in-store experience with knowledgeable staff that they can develop relationships with.

Wow, that formula sounds really familiar! It's a formula that we've been trying to perfect for the last 25 years and continue to try and improve every day. To us, it always just made sense. It seems that now, it's becoming the latest retail trend. P.S. Don't tell Warren our secret formula.

*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!

Like us on **Facebook.com/WildBirdStore** to post photos, ask questions and be the first to know about upcoming sales and events. Or follow us on **Twitter: @ASWildBirdStore**.

MAR.  
&  
APR.

## Early Spring

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

- ☐ Look high overhead for flocks of migrating Tundra Swans and Snow Geese.
- ☐ Track oriole, hummingbird and monarch migration at Journey North: [journeynorth.org](http://journeynorth.org).
- ☐ Be ready with live mealworms for returning Eastern Bluebirds beginning in early March.
- ☐ Mount a Wood Duck house on a pole and protect with a baffle.
- ☐ Open Purple Martin houses once you spot the first martins in the area.
- ☐ Provide nesting materials with **The Best Nest Builder** product.
- ☐ Put up a wren house and a chickadee house, placing the chickadee house out of direct line of sight of nesting wrens to reduce territorial conflicts.
- ☐ During the last week of April, put out nectar feeders for hummingbirds and feeders for orioles including half oranges, grape jelly, nectar, mealworms and **Insect to Go Suet Pellets**.
- ☐ Use seed in preformed seed cylinders like **Bugs, Nuts & Fruit** to prevent Starlings and House Sparrows from scattering seed.
- ☐ Bring feeders to your neighborhood All Seasons store for cleaning (fees apply).
- ☐ **Cracked feeders allow water to pool in the birdseed causing mold and mildew growth. Replace**



**damaged feeders with new easy-to-clean versions such as the Squirrel Buster family of feeders or Aspects Quick Clean feeders.**



- ☐ Scrub birdbaths with 9 parts water and 1 part bleach then add **Bird Bath Protector** to keep it clean.
- ☐ Moving water attracts more birds. Try a **Water Wiggler** in the bath or an **Easy Mister** in your garden.
- ☐ Rake up shell debris and dispose in the trash.
- ☐ Use no-mess seed and mixes such as **Medium Chips** and **Kracker Jax** for enjoyable bird feeding that leaves no shells to clean up.
- ☐ Measure 12' from trees and install a pole with a squirrel baffle or **Tough Bird Feeder Guard** for squirrel resistant feeding. See our handout, **Discouraging Squirrels**, for advice.
- ☐ **Plan to add bird, bee and butterfly-friendly plants to your yard. Check out our Birdscaping Basics for helpful ideas.**
- ☐ Watch Bald Eagles raise their young at [ustream.tv/decoraheagles](http://ustream.tv/decoraheagles).





# Feathers

Take a closer look at birds' most unique feature.

## Not Just for Flight

Feathers are a characteristic exclusively of birds; no other living animals have them. They are like hair on mammals or scales on reptiles. Feathers are composed of *keratin*, which is also the main ingredient of human nails and animal claws. A bird's feathers are very important to their survival and serve many purposes. They provide insulation from the cold, weatherproofing from rain or snow and camouflage from predators. Feathers also play a large role in the mating process.

Feathers must be both very strong and very light. They are subject to a lot of use. The tips and edges of feathers may wear, but this is natural and is remedied through periodic molting. Dark feathers tend to be more resistant to damage, which is why the outer wings and tails of some birds are black or dark.

## Different Feathers Serve Different Functions

**Contour feathers are the basic feathers of a bird's body and wings**, including the large flight feathers of the wing and tail.

The waterproof tips are exposed to the elements and the fluffy bases are tucked close to the body. Sometimes these feathers are brilliantly colored and sometimes they are drab. On some contour feathers, the tightly knit vanes have small barbs that help form an impenetrable surface. In contrast, owl contour feathers have soft fringe on one side of their wing feathers, a specialization which enables them to make little noise when flying.

Each contour feather has a set of specialized muscles beneath the surface of the skin that help hold the feathers together in the right position. *Remiges* are contour feathers of the wing, which allow the birds to fly. *Rectrices* are contour feathers in the tail, which are essential for steering.

*Bristle feathers* are contour feathers without vanes. Not all birds have bristle feathers. They are most commonly found on the head. Bristle feathers around the eyes, the nostrils and the mouth provide protection. Birds that eat insects are thought to use these feathers as sensory organs, like whiskers on a cat.

**Semiplumes are the feathers between the contour feathers and the down feathers**. They are seldom exposed but lie underneath the contour feathers, insulating the body.

**Down feathers of a bird have loose, fluffy vanes, which provide a layer of insulation.** Down feathers are not evenly distributed over a bird's body.

## Specialized Feathers

Some feathers are highly modified for display. For instance, the male Wood Duck's crest forms a colorful fan that looks like it changes the shape of its head in order to attract a female. The Wood Duck manipulates muscles under the skin to elevate thousands of tiny feathers. Blue Jays keep their feather crest lowered when they are at rest or with family flock members, but raise them during aggressive interactions.

## Maintaining Healthy Plumage

Since feathers are essential to the health and survival of birds, they must take great care of them. Feathers are dead structures that have no active circulatory system so they must be maintained from the outside. Birds have a number of ways to keep their feathers in good condition. You may notice birds preening—this is when they seem to almost nibble at their feathers; they are removing dirt and stale oil and smoothing the barbs so they will lock together. While preening the birds may also be spreading oil from an oil gland found near their rump. Birds will preen more often when they are molting.

We delight in watching the birds at our birdbath. Bathing is very important for the health of their feathers. Birds may bathe in a birdbath, in the snow, or even in a dust patch. They constantly work to keep their feathers clean and healthy in order to survive. ■

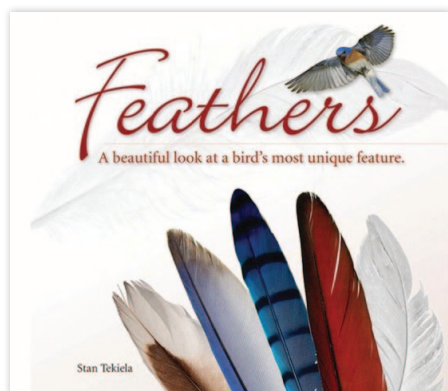
## DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

- ✧ Feathers protect a bird's skin from UV light.
- ✧ The red pigment of cardinal feathers and the yellow of goldfinch feathers comes mostly from their diet.
- ✧ Blue and green colors come from a reflection of light. A Blue Jay's feathers are not really blue—the blue color comes from reflecting only the blue light wavelengths.
- ✧ Iridescent feathers, like in the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, come from the refraction of light caused by the microscopic structure of the feather. Their colors often change slightly in different light.

## Learn More About Feathers

### *Feathers: A Beautiful Look at a Bird's Most Unique Feature*, by Stan Tekiela

This book is filled with stunning, one-of-a-kind photos of feathers. From the delicate down feathers that keep birds warm to the sturdy flight feathers that allow birds to fly. Everyone who celebrates nature will love the facts and photos in this book.



"...Highly recommended for the non-specialist general reader with a passing interest in the feathered beauty of birds. Replete with all manner of facts about feathers, [this book] will prove to be an enduringly popular addition to personal, community, and academic library collections."

— Carl Logan,  
"Reviewer's Bookwatch"

### *The Sibley Birds Coloring Field Journal*, by David Allen Sibley (Illustrated by Cecilia Lehar)

This book allows birding enthusiasts to create their own artist's portfolio. Printed in a unique hardbound format that accommodates the landscape and portrait line drawings as well as the creativity of its user. Reproductions of David Sibley's original full-color paintings

are included on the book's inside cover to assist the colorist as a reference. Twelve anatomical drawings of the structure and component parts (including feathers) of the birds' bodies are featured. ■



## STAFF PICKS

### Bat Houses

#### Woodlink Bat Houses

For best results, place your bat house in early April in a location where it will get the most sun exposure possible. Bat houses should be free of obstructions with at least 20' of open space to allow the bats to locate the house and easily fly in and out. Mount the bat house at least 15' high to keep predators out. For more information on installing a bat house, ask an All Seasons Wild Bird Store staff member or consult our website: [wildbirdstore.com/resources/troubleshooting-pests/encouraging-bats](http://wildbirdstore.com/resources/troubleshooting-pests/encouraging-bats). ■



Bat houses like these are available at All Seasons Wild Bird Stores. Please call ahead for specific models.

## COMMON MYTHS ABOUT BATS

Bats suffer from a history of misunderstanding in our culture. But did you know they're revered in Chinese culture, where they're considered to be symbols of good luck and happiness? Here are some myths—and truths—about bats. *Source: Bat Conservation International.*

**Myth:** Bats are blind.

**Truth:** Bats not only see as well as just about any other mammal, but most bats also use a unique biological sonar system called echolocation, which lets them navigate and hunt fast-flying insects in total darkness.

**Myth:** Bats are flying mice.

**Truth:** Nope. Bats are mammals, but they are not rodents. In fact, they are genetically more closely related to humans than to rats and mice.

**Myth:** Bats get tangled in your hair.

**Truth:** This was a common myth a few decades ago, but bats are much too smart and agile for that.

**Myth:** All bats are rabid.

**Truth:** No. Bats, like other mammals, can be infected with the rabies virus, but the vast majority of bats are not infected. However, a bat that can be easily approached by humans is likely to be sick and may bite if handled. Simply do not handle a bat or any other wild animal and there is little chance of being bitten.

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