



**ALL SEASONS  
WILD BIRD  
STORE**

# BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Volume 22 Issue 5 | September/October 2015

## Identifying & Photographing *Backyard Birds*

**+ Staff Product Picks**  
*Early Autumn 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.

### EXPERT TIPS

## *Easy Bird I.D.*

All Seasons Wild Bird Store Emeritus Employee and Author ROBERT B. JANSSEN

Did you ever think about the fact that more birds are heard than seen? This article, then, should be about the identification of bird song, right? But the art of learning bird song is one of the most challenging for birders of all skill and experience levels, so we'll keep that for another article. In this discussion we'll focus on a simple, more approachable method of bird identification.

The plumage identification of birds is also one of the most challenging, interesting, fun and exciting parts of the birding hobby. Many beginning birders feel they must learn to see color first to identify what species of bird they're seeing. To me, color identification is the wrong place to start.

### GISS METHOD OF IDENTIFICATION

When I received my first copy of Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds*, at age 10, opening the front cover I was intrigued by the black and white drawings of birds. I had expected to see color immediately. Here were silhouettes of over 50 of the most common species of birds a person would likely see.

This study of silhouettes was later defined by the term **GISS** (general impression of size and shape).

I believe GISS is the best way to identify birds. Each species of bird has a unique shape—yes, some are very subtle differences but if you know the difference between the shape of a meadowlark and a kingbird, for example, sitting on a fence post, you have come a long way in identifying birds.

When using the GISS method of identifying birds, you can use flight patterns, walking style, various other movements, plumage characteristics and, of course, song to identify birds. Think of it in the way you identify people from a distance. We each have a unique posture, hair style, walk, movements of other body parts (like how we swing our arms) and, of course, voice. Our voices are unique (continued on page 4)



▲ GISS considers bird size and shape to identify birds

Northern Cardinal Photo by Jim Weisman



## Excited to Showcase All Seasons Staff!

For me, this is a very exciting issue of our bimonthly *Bird's-Eye View* publication because the main articles feature two of our terrific part-time employees.

**Bob Janssen** is widely regarded as the most esteemed and accomplished Minnesota birder—ever. Although he's not working for us in the store on a regular basis any longer, he stays involved by leading regular bird walks for our staff and contributes his expertise when tough birding questions arise. He's also an accomplished author and we are thankful to him for sharing this piece on bird identification. We are so very blessed to have him be a part of our business in whatever way he can. Bob is a true treasure.

**Jim Weisman** is an incredibly talented amateur photographer. You'll see his photographs in many of our publications and exhibited on our digital slideshows in the stores. Taking photos of birds in the wild is not an easy endeavor. It takes a lot of preparation and patience to be able to capture amazing images. Jim truly loves his subject matter and that enthusiasm spills over into his attitude and expertise as part of our staff. I hope you enjoy the published interview and pick up some tips on how you too can take great photographs of birds.

*Al and 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.**



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

SEPT.  
&  
OCT.

## Early Autumn

By Minnetonka Manager CAROL CHENAULT

- ☐ Fill **nectar feeders** for migrating hummingbirds; they will continue to visit your feeders into October. Keep your hummingbird feeders up until you don't see any hummers for a week or the nectar freezes.

- ☐ **Keep Nyjer™ feeders full. Try Nyjer and Chips; it's less mess for you and high oil content for the birds. Nyjer is good for Minnesota goldfinches all year. Note: goldfinches molt their bright yellow plumage after nesting season. The male winter coloring is a dull olive green, similar to the females. The new coloring often makes them go unnoticed, blending in with the winter surroundings.**



- ☐ **Juncos are coming! Scatter some Finches' Choice or Spectrum on the ground or in a ground feeder for these winter visitors. White-throated Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows and Mourning Doves are also ground feeders that will enjoy this treat.**



- ☐ 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. Rinse the feeders with clear water for at least 10 seconds, and make sure they are completely dry before refilling. We offer a **birdfeeder cleaning service**, if you'd rather have us do it!

- ☐ **Offer peanut pick-outs and suet to Red-breasted Nuthatches arriving in the fall.**



- ☐ Update or add to your pole system now, before the ground freezes. We'll be glad to help you choose what's best for your yard.
- ☐ Keep a watch for the robins and Cedar Waxwings feeding on berry shrubs and trees, like mountain ash, viburnums and dogwoods. The fall is a great time to plant shrubs and trees!
- ☐ Fill feeders with **Medium Chips** (shelled sunflower) and **Kracker Jax**; they do not leave any shell mess under your feeder. Add some **dried mealworms** and **suet pellets** to any seed mix for an extra energy boost for overwintering birds.
- ☐ Clean out or take down your birdhouses. If you leave the houses up over the winter, open the side/bottom of the birdhouse to prevent mice from winter nesting.
- ☐ Close up Purple Martin houses.
- ☐ Don't cut all of the seed heads from your perennials. Birds will eat these seed heads into the winter. Particularly valuable are purple coneflower, black-eyed Susan, sunflowers and hollyhock.

- ☐ Indian Meal Moths are very active in September. To prevent these unwanted guests, store your seed in tins on the deck, in the garage or in the shed. For easy access, store smaller quantities in the freezer. o remove moths, install a moth trap.
- ☐ Brush up on migration patterns: September is the main month for the southward migration of monarchs, plus warblers, vireos, grosbeaks and sparrows. Blue Jays migrate in flocks across Minnesota (learn more at **JourneyNorth.org**). **Hawk Ridge** in Duluth hosts several events for major raptor migrations.
- ☐ Draw birds in closer to your home for better viewing with a birdbath.



# Behind the Lens

## Focus on Amateur Bird Photographer Jim Weisman

By Guest Contributor KATRINA HASE. Photos by JIM WEISMAN.

*With patience, a playset blind, and “a lot of luck,” All Seasons Wild Bird Store employee and customer Jim Weisman captures stunning images of backyard birds.*



### Q: How did you start taking pictures of birds?

**A:** I moved to Minnesota 11 years ago. The first spring I was here I saw a Pileated Woodpecker. I knew I had to get a picture of it, but I didn't have a good camera. We also had owls in the woods behind us and I took a lot of pictures of it because I thought they were cool. I finally got a decent camera—the one I have now—and that's how it happened. I was hooked on taking photographs of birds.

Each bird I photograph has a folder in my computer. I believe I probably have a photo of every species of bird I've seen in my yard!

### Q: What's your secret to getting such great shots?



▲ Baltimore Oriole with a Wood Duck in background

**A:** Patience. I know the birds are going to be there. I just sit in my daughter's Rainbow® playset—I put a patio chair up there—and wait. You need to sit and observe. I've learned a trick is to sit there for 15-20 minutes, because going out there disturbs the birds. After that time, the birds start to go back to their normal behavior.

### Q. What makes a good bird photo?

**A:** A good pose. I like to get their back with them looking over their shoulder at you.

For instance, goldfinches—males—have beautiful stripes on their wings that you don't see most of the time. If I can get them looking over the shoulder so you can see the eye and the wings—that's a good shot. Blue Jays are like that too.



▲ A Blue Jay looking over its shoulder

### Interactions and juxtapositions.



▲ A male Baltimore Oriole feeding a female

I like shots that show two birds in one frame. You may get a shot that shows a parent feeding a baby bird or something like the Wood Duck in a tree with a Baltimore Oriole in front.

**Unusual features.** A lot of shots I don't realize what I've got until I get them on the computer, like a photo I took of a balding cardinal. Those accidents turned into something I look for now. Or sometimes I'll just be photographing a bird, like a chickadee on a feeder, and I'll be snapping away when it flips upside down and looks like it's doing push-ups. It's just luck!



▲ A chickadee doing “push-ups”

**Behavior.** Watching the birds over time, I know where the good shots are going to be. I can count on the House Finches to eat the golden safflower. So if I hear them, I'll start to focus the camera on the safflower feeder. Or the Pileated Woodpecker—if I see or hear it nearby, I'll automatically focus on the tree by the suet feeder, because it usually lands there. Then I'll get a shot on the suet feeder next. I know the behavior to look for.

**Lighting.** The light is best right after sunrise and before sunset. About 30 minutes before sunset makes everything so beautiful! If the sun is out that day, I'll make a point to go out that evening right before sunset.



▲ A hummingbird shines in morning light

### Q. What lessons have you learned from photographing birds?

**A:** Some people don't have something in their life to get excited about. With birds, I'm learning so much all the time and I love it! People who don't have something like that—what do they do? I feel privileged to be watching birds. And if I can take pictures and share them, that's good enough for me. ■

*Read the full interview and see more of Jim's photos on our blog: [WildBirdStore.com/blog](http://WildBirdStore.com/blog).*

Jim Weisman works at the Wayzata All Seasons Wild Bird Store. He uses a Panasonic Lumix F2.8 DMC-FZ200 automatic digital camera with a 25-600mm lens.



## EXPERT TIPS: EASY BIRD I.D.

(continued from page 1) identifying attributes for each of us. This is how we can identify aunt Mary, whom we haven't seen in a long time, when we are meeting her in a crowd of people at the airport. Think of bird identification in the same way. Learn the unique size and shape of each species; then practice observing the different plumage shades and color brightness.

### What About Color?

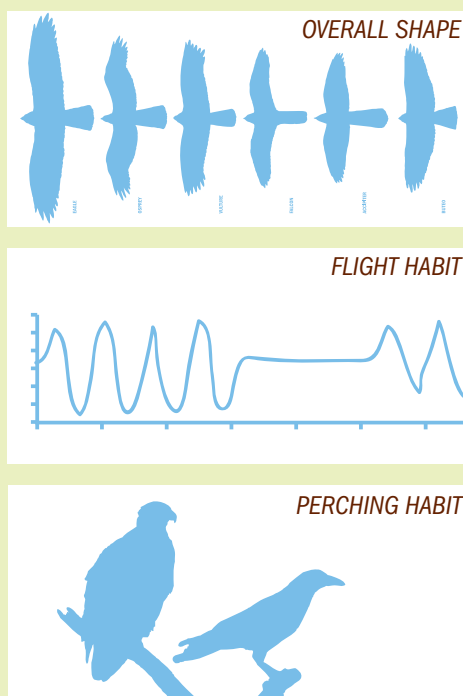
I know you are now going to say, "But color is the most enjoyable thing about seeing birds!" Yes, this is certainly true. But just think of how satisfied you will be when you call out to your friends (or yourself!), "That's a Brown Thrasher," as it swiftly flies away before you have a chance to see any color. You will have relied upon the shape of the bird, or perhaps a unique sound it made.

GISS definitely is a simple way to quickly and accurately identify birds.

### The Big Reward

One of my favorite quotations comes from Jonathan Rosen's book *Life of the Skies*: "I can't think of any activity that more fully captures what it means to be human in the modern world than watching birds." Thus, enjoy bird identification in a way that suits your particular style. Birds are everywhere you go, day or night. Pay attention to them, and you'll be rewarded with an ever-growing appreciation of our natural world. ■

At right: example of using the GISS method for identifying raptors: looking at overall shape and size, flight patterns and perching style to identify species.



## STAFF PICKS

### Red Lantern Feeder

Recommended by Minnetonka Store Manager, Carol Chenault



One of my favorite feeders is the Red Lantern. The all-metal construction makes this feeder durable. It's easy to fill and has a lock on top. The seed deflector keeps some

seed on the upper half of the feeder, even as it empties, providing two-level feeding. The lower half of the feeder empties into the tray a little at a time, as the birds eat. I use **Golden Safflower** or **Dakota Mix**, but this feeder also works great for **black-oil sunflower**. My cardinals and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks eat from the tray, and the goldfinches cling all over the mesh to feed. The tray is small enough to deter Mourning Doves. The Red Lantern is also easy to clean. I use a little dish soap then just spray it out to thoroughly clean, without even having to disassemble. ■

### Suet Plugs and Log Feeders

Recommended by Wayzata Store Manager, Melissa Block



For birds, the most popular way to eat suet is with a suet log. Birds cling to the outside surface and feed on the suet in the pre-drilled holes. These suet logs are made of wood or recycled plastic. Simply warm up a plug, mold the plug to fit in the hole, and

then slide it in. Be sure the suet fills the hole by pressing the end all the way into the hole. It is a very natural way for our woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees to feed on suet.



The suet plugs are made from high-quality beef suet, with essential vitamins, minerals and protein added. They come in a variety of flavors (Plain, Roasted Peanut, Sunflower and No-melt Peanut Butter). There's even a suet log with hot pepper to dissuade the squirrels! ■

## TIME CAPSULE

A Sample of Jim Gilbert's Phenological Observations from 5 Years Ago

September 9, 2010  
White-throated Sparrows appear.



September 20, 2010  
A late Ruby-throated Hummingbird passes through Luts.



September 28, 2010  
The first sighting of a Dark-eyed Junco at feeding stations.



October 7, 2010  
Fox Sparrows arrive. They like to eat millet and cracked corn.



October 30, 2011  
Migrating Flocks of Tundra Swans arrive.



**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.