



ALL SEASONS
WILD BIRD
STORE

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Volume 30 Issue 5 | September/October 2023



Black Feathers

Common Bird Misconceptions
+ Seasonal Notes

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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.

FEATURE ARTICLE

By Eagan Manager ANN MCCARTHY

Reality or Misconception?

Even the most enthusiastic backyard birder may be surprised to learn that some commonly held beliefs about birds are misconceptions.

Misconception: American Goldfinches migrate south each winter.

Reality: Although the American Goldfinch remains in Minnesota all winter, the males become almost unrecognizable as they lose their bright, yellow breeding plumage and take on a drab, olive-green plumage.



Summer plumage Winter plumage

Misconception: Birds sing for enjoyment.

Reality: While we can't be sure if birds enjoy singing, we do know that bird song plays important roles in attracting a mate, communication and territory defense.

Misconception: Birds mate for life.

Reality: The vast majority of our backyard birds pair for one breeding season or even just a single nesting period. Some notable exceptions include Bald Eagles and Sandhill Cranes, which appear to form pair bonds that last until one dies.

Misconception: If you touch a young bird that has fallen out of a nest it will be abandoned by its parents.

Reality: Birds have a limited sense of smell, so mother birds can't detect human scent on their offspring. Find the nearby nest and place the young bird in it. It may have attempted to fledge, was pushed out by a sibling, or had been plucked out by a predator.



Birds don't have a good sense of smell.

Misconception:

Feeding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds through September will impact their migration.

Reality: Feeding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds through September will ensure that they have the necessary energy they need for their journey. *Continued on Page 2 . . .*



Feeding hummingbirds in the fall won't stall migration.

Enhancing Birdwatching with Technology

With the integration of innovative tools and applications, technology has opened up a whole new world for birdwatchers and bird feeders alike, enhancing their experiences in unprecedented ways.

Digital Field Guides: Gone are the days of carrying bulky books; digital field guides offer instant access to a wealth of information, including bird identification, behavior, and vocalizations right at your fingertips.

Birding Apps: Mobile applications equipped with bird identification algorithms and real-time birding alerts have transformed the way enthusiasts interact with their surroundings. These apps can instantly identify species based on photos or bird songs, providing an interactive and educational experience. The Merlin App is shown in detail in this issue.

Live Birdcams: Thanks to live streaming technology, bird enthusiasts can now observe birds in their natural habitats from the comfort of their homes. Birdcams offer a fascinating window into the lives of birds, capturing their behaviors and nesting activities, regardless of the viewer's location.

Citizen Science Platforms: Technology has facilitated the rise of citizen science initiatives, like Cornell's Project Feeder Watch, enabling birders to contribute to valuable research and conservation efforts. Through platforms like eBird, individuals can record and share their bird sightings, contributing to comprehensive databases that aid in understanding bird populations and migration patterns.

By embracing these tools, birders can deepen their knowledge, contribute to scientific endeavors, and foster a greater appreciation for the magnificent avian world that surrounds us. ■

~ Dave Netten

Owner, All Seasons Wild Bird Store

Misconception: Cold weather triggers autumn migration.

Reality: Migration is triggered by combined factors including length of day, changes in food supplies, temperatures and genetics.

Misconception: American Robins migrate.

Reality: While some American Robins do migrate short distances, many will stay in Minnesota all winter, as long as their habitat needs are met i.e. food, water, cover.

Misconception: My cat would never kill a bird.

Reality: According to the American Bird Conservancy, cats are the #1 threat to



birds, killing more than a billion songbirds annually.

Misconception: Birds eat small amounts of food each day.

Reality: Birds have a very fast metabolism. In fact, some birds consume their weight each day in food.

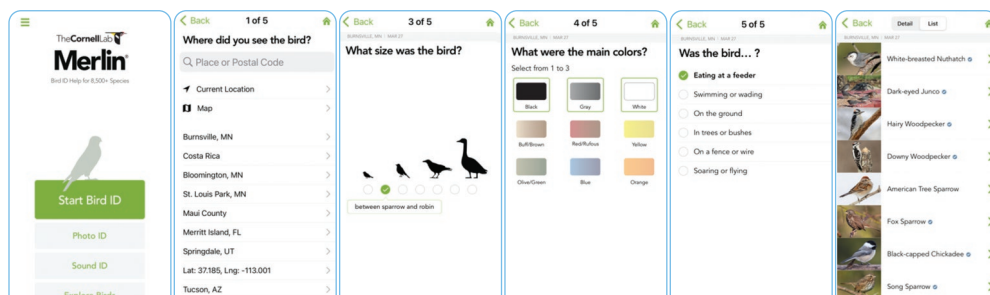
Misconception: A bird keeps hitting my window. There must be something wrong with it.

Reality: It is likely a male who sees its reflection in a window thinks that it is a rival. Put up a dish towel to block the reflection. ■

STAFF FAVORITE

By Eagan Sales Associate DOUG HANSELL

Merlin® Bird ID Makes Birding a Wiz



A demonstration of several of the Merlin® app's many functions.

Imagine you're walking through the woods and hear a bird call with which you're not familiar. Or you're on a vacation and see an unfamiliar bird. Or a friend, new to birding, describes a visitor to their feeder. The Merlin® Bird ID app from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology can help!

The app allows users to describe a bird based on location, date, size, main colors, and what the bird is doing.

It also has a Photo ID feature. I used my phone to take a photo of a bird I didn't know, and the app identified it as a Northern Shoveler; a species I'd never seen before.

Another feature I'm enjoying is the Sound ID. Allow the app to "listen" to a bird sound with your camera's microphone and it will identify birds within earshot.

The magic of Merlin® is that it allows you to save a "Life List" of when and where you spotted your winged wonders.

Merlin® knows where you are. It's not magic, it's via your phone's location. However, you will need to install "Bird Packs" which contain the species that are usually found in a specific geographical area.

These packs can, for example, include all the continental US and Canada, or be as specific as just the state of Minnesota. You can choose based on how far you wander to enjoy your birding habit.

The joys of birding include hearing and seeing familiar creatures and the thrill of discovering a new, long-sought avian mystery. Merlin® is a tremendous, shall I say—wizardsly—assistant! ■

BLACK *Beauties*

Black plumage is ubiquitous across bird species, whether adorning a bird from head to toe in inky feathers, or accessorizing a bird as high-contrast accents. Why is black so common? It turns out that black feathers provide some important survival advantages.

Strength and Protection

Black feathers contain a high concentration of melanin. Within the feathers, melanin granules play the roles both as a pigment and as building blocks in the nano-structure of feathers.



Black feathers are stronger against abrasion.

Feathers containing melanin are much stronger against abrasion and wear than those without the pigment. This may explain why black feathers are more likely to occur in body areas on birds that are more vulnerable to abrasion, such as wing feathers.

The melanin in black feathers also absorbs a much greater portion of the ultraviolet (UV) light that can damage a bird's feathers and skin. Researchers discovered that birds that had higher levels of melanin in their feathers had lower levels of UV damage.

Heat Regulation



Double-crested Cormorants use their black feathers to regulate their heat.

The color black absorbs all wavelengths of light, which is converted into heat. Double-crested Cormorants take advantage of their heat-absorbing black plumage to stay warm. These diving birds, whose

feathers don't shed water well, lose heat quickly to the water. Cormorants will spread their wings out in the sun to take advantage of their black, heat-absorbing plumage. They also build their nests in full sun.

Black desert birds like Common Ravens offer a seemingly paradoxical example of black feathers and heat absorption.



In contrast to low-lying, water-soaked cormorants, ravens are regularly in contact with higher wind speeds. Their large, overlying feathers effectively absorb the sun's rays and the wind whisks away the heat before it can penetrate the bird's skin. Black birds have adapted behavioral adjustments to deal with heat in the absence of wind, such as seeking shade, panting, and raising their feathers to shed heat.

Additional Advantages

Black plumage can provide a stealth cloak for birds who lurk at night or in shaded areas, helping them to blend into their surroundings to evade predators or to ambush prey. In light-colored desert environments, black feathers may function as a warning coloration in some birds, letting potential predators know they're not worth the effort to approach.

In some species, black plumage is pronounced in the male, while the female is a duller, lighter color. This suggests that the



Darker-throated House Sparrows better attract females.

color black may play a role in selecting suitable mates. One study found that male House Sparrows with darker throat feathers were more attractive to females than those with lighter bibs. Another study found that less healthy House Sparrows grew fewer black feathers.

Black plumage appears to be quite beneficial to birds, a quality that many species embrace. Research into the color of birds is an active and exciting field that will no doubt reveal more over time. ■

September & October

Monarchs migrate south, visiting Autumn Joy sedum, wild asters, goldenrod and Mexican sunflowers as they travel to the mountain forests west of Mexico City.

Orioles leave Minnesota by September 7th for the neo-tropics.



Ruby-throated Hummingbirds leave northern Minnesota in early September, but migrating hummingbirds will continue to use nectar feeders well into October in the lower half of the state. These birds will

winter from South Texas to Costa Rica.

September is a great time to plant perennials. Choose pollinator-friendly plants with the help of our **Landscaping for Birds—Birdscaping Basics** handout. Pick one up in stores or find it online.

Switch to Golden Safflower or White Safflower until the **Common Grackles** and **Red-winged Blackbirds** migrate through. These seeds are less appealing to them than black-oil sunflower seed mixes.

Zinnias provide seeds for goldfinches, while bees and butterflies also visit fall-blooming asters and sedum. Leave the seed heads on the perennials in your gardens; birds will eat from these into the winter. Particular favorites are: purple coneflower, perennial sunflower, black-eyed Susan and hollyhocks.



A goldfinch dines on seeds from a perennial sunflower.

By the third week of September, Dark-eyed Juncos arrive.

They feast on the ground under bird feeders and will soon be joined by native sparrows such as **American Tree Sparrows**, **Fox**, **White-throated** and perhaps some **White-crowned Sparrows** as fall progresses.

Indian meal moths are very active in September. Prevent unwanted guests in your house by storing your bird seed in garbage cans or tins on the deck or in the garage. Smaller bags can be stored in the freezer. To remove moths, install a sticky trap specifically for Indian meal moths, sold in stores and in our online store.

Peak migration of Yellow-rumped Warblers occurs around the autumnal equinox, September 22nd.

Groups of Common Loons gather on lakes in preparation for

migration to the Gulf Coast or Atlantic Seaboard.

Keep Nyjer® feeders full of fresh seed for goldfinches, our last songbird to fledge young. By the end of October, they will be in their olive-yellow winter plumage. Goldfinches will visit feeders year-round.

Soon it's time for the heated birdbath! Fill your heated birdbath bowl with a 50:50 solution of white vinegar to water and let it soak overnight in the house. Scrub it out to remove the limescale and rinse before returning outdoors. Add **Bird Bath Protector™** to the bath to prevent organic contamination.

Use Songbird Delight to reduce mess under feeders, or use **Select Sunflower Hearts** or **Kracker Jax** for no shell mess at all.



Songbird Delight



Kracker Jax



Select Sunflower Hearts

Rotate the seed in your feeders by emptying the seed into a paper bag outside. Put fresh seed in the bottom half of the feeder and fill it the rest of the way with the seed from the bag. Goldfinches, in particular, like the upper perches and will eat the older seed first. Using an **Aspects Quick Clean feeder** with the easy-off bottom makes this process much more convenient. No more stale seed in the feeders!

Use a compressed seed cylinder of **Golden Safflower**, a **Flaming Hot Feast seed cylinder**, or seed bells to deter squirrels. **Flaming Hot Feast loose seed** for tube and hopper feeders will feed birds without inviting squirrels. Add **Flaming Squirrel Oil** or **Fire Mix** powder to any seed to deter squirrels. Birds have few taste buds and are not bothered by the spice! ■



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

Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter at WildBirdStore.com to receive information about backyard birding, store events and exclusive discounts.