

30
YEARS



R. Höcken

Birding IN THE Backyard

JULY 2025

TURKEY VULTURE

BY KELSEY

Spotted a dark silhouette in the sky you thought was an eagle, only to wonder why it's flying like that and where the white head has gone? Do the wings look dark and light instead of just dark, so now you're even more confused?

You've seen a Turkey Vulture!

Turkey Vultures are large, dark brown birds with long tails. Their long, broad wings are dark, matching their body, except for the paler undersides of their flight feathers that give them a distinctive two-toned colouration. The tips of the wings appear to have long 'finger-like' feathers, and their head's are bald and red in colour, with a pale, sharply hooked bill.

Turkey Vultures don't flap their wings, instead they use thermals to gain height for soaring. They can be spotted doing wobbly, unsteady circles in the air; tipping back and forth as they search for a meal. When seen from the front, you'll notice their wings are slightly raised to form a V shape.

These large raptors feed off of freshly dead carcasses, and almost never go for still living prey. Turkey Vultures are able to safely eat roadkill and other dead animals due to their highly acidic stomach acid, which allows them to digest almost anything.

They are prone to flying low, in order to properly pick up the scent of a potential food source. They have a keen sense of smell, especially when compared with other birds, that they use to search out food sources.

Vultures are scavengers, commonly spotted in open areas like roadsides, suburbs, farm fields, and the countryside. They're also frequent visitors to areas near potential food sources like landfills, trash heaps, and construction sites.



J. Purves

Turkey Vultures, though often feeding around humans, prefer to nest far from civilization. They don't build a full nest, but can scrape out an area in soil or leaf litter, arrange rotting wood and vegetation scraps, or move obstacles to lay their eggs in their desired location.

Once the spot is chosen, Turkey Vultures can reuse their nesting site for over a decade.

When feeling threatened, a Turkey Vulture will projectile vomit at the threat, which is horrifying when you consider their preferred food sources. Make sure to give them plenty of space when spotted!

Though sometimes given a bad rap, vultures are an essential part of a healthy ecosystem. They are vital to help keep carcasses from accumulating, rotting, and spreading diseases.

THE TURKEY VULTURE VS BALD EAGLE

TURLEY VULTURE (LEFT) AND BALD EAGLE (RIGHT)



TURKEY VULTURE
—S. PETERSEN

BALD EAGLES are a large raptor with long, dark brown wings. Adults have a white head and tail, which the juveniles lack until roughly 5 years after fledging. Young eagles have mottled white and dark wings that can make them harder to tell apart from the vultures. During flight, eagles hold their wings flat like a board.

TURKEY VULTURES are large raptors with long, dark brown wings and gray flight feathers, giving them a two toned look. Their flight is more soaring in wobbly circles with their wings held up in a slight V shape when seen from the front or back. They have small, bald red heads.

Juvenile eagles can be hard to tell apart from vultures. Watch for flapping wings and a flat silhouette when soaring to help tell the difference.



BALD EAGLE
—R. HOCKEN



GETTING CLEAN USING...DIRT?

BY KELSEY

When we think of baths, we assume that water is always going to be involved, but that isn't the case for birds. Though they will use water, plenty of bird species will also utilize dirt, often called a dust bath, as a vital part of their preening process.

The dirt works almost like a bird-y shampoo; it helps them remove excess oils that can cause their feathers to become oily and matted, dry skin, and other debris that can affect their feathers' performance.

Preening keeps their feathers aligned, helps to waterproof their bodies, gets rid of molted feathers, and can even remove parasites that may cause diseases.

Typically, a bird will scratch out a depression in the ground in an area with fine soil that lacks debris or clumps. Once the depression is hollowed out, the bird will settle into it, flapping their wings with their tail spread and feathers fluffed, to make sure the dust gets all the way through their feathers to their skin.

They'll follow up by rubbing their head and neck into the dirt to ensure it gets everywhere, repeating the process until they're satisfied, before shaking off the dirt and retiring to a nearby perch, where they'll preen the remains of the dirt and debris out of their feathers.

To add a dust bathing area in your yard, you can clear a spot on your property near a tree or other perch, and fill with fine, loose soil. Rocks, clumps, and other debris should be removed to allow the birds easy and quick access to a safe bathing area.

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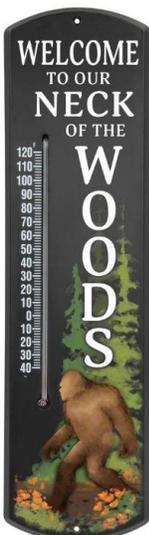
Wall Thermometers

Want to know exactly how warm it is outside?

Wall-mounted, outdoor thermometers come in four fun designs.

All temperatures shown in Fahrenheit.

\$26.99 EA.



WAIT, THAT'S NOT A GOLDEN BUPRESTID?

BY DAVE

Are *you* a heinous, sweaty beast?

Do you like little bees?

Well, you're in luck; it's Sweat Bee season. Yay!

In our area, Sweat Bees start showing up in the gardens shortly after our mason bees finish their season. Like mason bees, Sweat Bees are solitary, non-aggressive pollinators. They come up in droves during the flowering season, and make excellent pollinators due to numbers alone.

Sweat Bees are a very diverse family of bees that come in a variety of sizes. They're smaller than the mason bee, between 3mm and 10mm long, and more streamlined. Some species of Sweat Bee are colourful, making them easier to spot scrumping about in your flowers.

Most Sweat Bees also need salt in their diet, and our sweaty summertime bodies are perfect for a quick drink.

No need to panic, though! Any Sweat Bee trying to land on you isn't being aggressive, they're just thirsty, and you're an excellent thirst trap.

Naturally, out of all the Sweat Bee species, I chose to write about one of the ones that doesn't even live up to the name.

Fine Striped Sweat Bees, or *Agapostemon subtilior*, are a member of the *Agapostemon texanum* complex. They're also some of our prettiest pollinators. Female Fine Striped Sweat Bees are a bright, metallic green all over, while the males have metallic green heads and thoraxes paired with yellow and black striped abdomens. Very pretty!

They aren't as fuzzy as our local mason bees, but they do have a fine coating of hair called *setae* that collect and spread pollen as they move between flowers, making them a superb pollinator.

Female Sweat Bees lay their eggs in nests that are usually underground. Sometimes, multiple females will use the same nest entrance, though they all set up their own separate brood cells. Once hatched, the larval stage Sweat Bees are fed pollen and nectar until pupation.

In our area, Sweat Bees lay one new generation per year. Females are active in late spring to early summer, while males join the pre-diapause females in later summer.

Mated female Fine Striped Sweat Bees enter diapause, or a state of suspended development similar to hibernation, in order to avoid the cold of autumn and winter—and can you blame them? It can get pretty cold!

Post-diapause, they emerge in early spring to continue their cycle and start all over again.



D. Veljacic

Other members of the Sweat Bee family include Furrow Bees, or *Halictus*, who are dark gray or black with distinctive abdominal hair bands.

Lagioglossum are similar to the Furrow Bees, but with less defined hair bands, and may have a metallic sheen to the thorax and abdomen.

Blood Bees, of the *Sphecodes* genus, are cleptoparasitic bees that don't create a nest or collect pollen. Blood Bees have a shiny black head and thorax paired with a brilliant red abdomen.

Keep an eye out around flowering plants in the backyard and see how many different Sweat Bees (and other bees) you can spot!

COMMON INSECT POLLINATORS

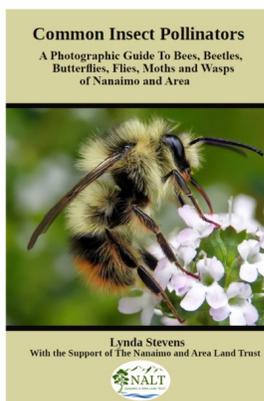


A photographic guide to bees, beetles, butterflies, flies, moths, and wasps of Nanaimo and eastern Vancouver Island.

The guide is written by Lynda Stevens, local photographer and pollinator enthusiast.

The guide contains an overview of insect anatomy, 233 large colour photographs, a brief description of the pollinator groups with main identifiable features, their general size, and roughly when you should be able to see them.

\$25.00 ea.



DID YOU KNOW?

Hummingbirds are the only birds who are able to fly backwards. Their wings move in a figure-8 pattern rather than up and down, allowing them unmatched maneuverability in the air.



LITTLE BROWN BAT

BY KELSEY



US Fish & Wildlife Services—Flickr

MAINTAINING BAT POPULATIONS IN BUILDINGS

SEPARATE BAT AND HUMAN LIVING SPACES

Block off any potential access 15mm or larger to keep bats out of human living areas, and put up signs or barriers to keep people out of the bat areas.

MITIGATE ANY ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE BATS (NOISE, SMELLS, ETC.)

Clean the area annually, cover the area under the roost with a plastic tarp for easy removal and cleaning, and insulate borders between bat and human areas.

REMOVE OR REDUCE HAZARDS TO BATS USING THE ROOST

Take out anything that they may get trapped in, avoid using sticky traps, and keep cats inside when possible to avoid predation.

For more ideas on how to coexist with bats in the building, visit BCBats.ca

You can also get involved with the largest bat colony in the mid-island area, found in the Oyster Bay Community Center, as a count volunteer.



Locally Crafted Bat Boxes

Single and multi-chamber bat boxes are available. Paint black or other dark colours, and be sure to mount the box at least 15 feet up in an open area, ideally facing south for the most sun exposure.

A bat box will not attract bats to your area, but it does give them a place to roost if they are already present.

Single-Chamber: \$69.99 EA.
Multi-Chamber: \$109.99 EA.



Little Brown Bats, also known as Little Brown Myotis, are one of fifteen bat species native to BC. They're around 8 to 10 centimeters long, and weigh between 7 and 9 grams—roughly as much as a single loonie. Their wingspan tops out around 25 to 27 centimeters.

Found in every province and territory excluding Nunavut, the Little Brown Bat has one of the widest ranges of Canadian native bats. It's also found in most of the United States, and in cooler mountainous regions in Central Mexico.

In looks, it appears very similar to the Northern Long-eared Bat. The most easily spotted differences are the Little Brown's short ears, and a fleshy projection over the ear entrance of the Little Brown Bat that isn't present on the Northern Long-eared.

Like other bats, they're nocturnal and will typically roost in buildings, trees, or caves, depending on what's available. The females usually have one pup at a time, and they raise their babies in attics, abandoned buildings, barns, and tree cavities. The pup learns to fly around three weeks old, just in time to migrate.

From late summer into fall, Little Brown Bats migrate to caves and mines, where they hibernate from October or November through March or April. Male Little Brown Bats may emerge later, into June.

Despite their wide range, Little Brown Bats are classified as an endangered species in Canada. This is due primarily to an invasive fungus that causes *White-nose Syndrome* (WNS). WNS is a fungal disease caused by *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, which is spreading rapidly across North America. *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* is responsible for the deaths of millions of bats over the past ten years.

Other threats to the species include the loss and degradation of native habitats, pollution, climate change, wind turbines, and pesticides.

Despite public opinion of bats being affected by myths and media that portrays them as a terrifying carrier of disease—or a vampire—bats are actually a beneficial mammal that feed on and control night flying insects in your backyard. If you see one flying overhead, chances are it's lowering your mosquito population!

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TOO HOT TO HANDLE

BY KELSEY

You may notice that during the summer bird activity appears to slow, or even stop. During the heat, birds will adjust their activity levels to help conserve energy and moisture.

During July and August, birds tend to focus their activity during dawn and dusk, and stick to shadier, cooler areas as much as possible when the temperatures are high.

They are more likely to perch or roost quietly, and less prone to territorial or courtship displays. Lowering activity levels and keeping to cool, shady areas whenever possible helps keep birds from overheating.

Like mammals, birds are warm-blooded species. This means that they generate heat internally rather than relying on external sources the way reptiles and other cold-blooded creatures do. What it also means is, if not properly regulated, they are prone to overheating just like we are.

Wild birds have developed many different methods to help regulate their body temperature in the summer.

One of the best methods to help birds cool off is a nice, cool soak. As wet feathers dry, the evaporation causes cooler temperatures in a process known as *evaporative cooling*.

Some species, like herons, have long, thin legs that help them to release heat. As blood flows down their featherless legs, heat dissipates through the skin and the cooler blood flows back into their body, lowering their internal temperature. This natural thermoregulation is boosted when the bird stands in cool water.



Other birds, such as owls and ravens, are able to release heat through quickly fluttering their neck muscles in a process called *gular fluttering*. The process vibrates energy off of their bodies as well as creating paths for airflow to reach their skin, cooling them down.

Another method many birds employ is panting. Birds don't have the ability to sweat like we do, but they sure can pant like a dog. You may notice birds sitting with open mouths, breathing heavily during warm months. The heat energy is released through their open mouths as air is pulled in, causing moisture in the birds' lungs, throat and mouth to evaporate and cooling the bird down.

During warmer temperatures, certain birds will switch up their diet to cope. High heat can cause insect activity to drop, making it harder for insect-eaters to find food. Birds like warblers can switch from insect-heavy diets to more fruits, nectar, and the occasional suet or hummingbird feeder to get the nutrition they need.

One benefit of the switch is fruit and nectar has a higher moisture content, helping the birds stay hydrated.

Higher temperatures increase wild birds' need for water. It's crucial that they have reliable access to a water source for both drinking and bathing in order to keep themselves cool and hydrated, and cut down on the risks of overheating.

Birds may also travel longer distances in search of a water source, increasing their exposure to the sun and heat. Adding a simple dish of water to your yard can be a big help to all wild bird during the warmer months, whether it's deep enough for a bath or just shallow enough for a drink.



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COOL GUARD

For anyone who gets hot, works outside, and needs to cool off.

Wrap around your neck, wrist, or forehead when damp to help cool the blood flow around your body, lowering your internal temperature.



100% cotton tie with non-toxic, polyacrylamide beads to retain water for long periods of time.

Made in Canada.

\$12.99 ea.



BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to thebirdstore.blogspot.com.

Bird Walks are on pause for the summer months and will resume in September with exact dates TBD.

The Sunday Bird Walk leaves The Backyard at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings, or meets on location at 9:15 a.m.

The Parksville/Qualicum Beach Tuesday Bird Walk meet up location is the Parksville Tourist Information Center parking lot by Highway 19, Northwest Bay Rd. and Franklin's Gull Rd. in Parksville, also at 9 a.m., or on location at 9:15 a.m.

Bird Walks are not held during the summer months (July & August) but resume in early September. There is no charge for our bird walks, and they are designed to conclude before lunch (average approximately 2 hours).

We decide on the location of each bird walk the week before the scheduled bird walk outing. During the week we compile information about what birds are being seen and examine the weather forecast to ensure the walk is scheduled for the most productive location.

All experience levels welcome. Bring your own binoculars when possible for the best experience.

Check out our [online map](#) for common bird walk locations around Nanaimo and Parksville.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday-Saturday 9:30-5:30

Sunday 12:00-4:30

UPCOMING HOLIDAY HOURS

July 1st, Canada Day: CLOSED

August 4th, BC Day: CLOSED

CONTACT US

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250-390-3669

Toll Free 1-888-808-BIRD [2473]

info@thebackyard.ca

thebackyard.ca

thebirdstore.blogspot.com

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BIRD SIGHTINGS

Report bird sightings by emailing birding@thebackyard.ca or calling 250-390-3669

JUNE 1ST

4 Western Tanagers at Crystal Place by Countryclub.

JUNE 14TH

Western Tanager at backyard in Lantzville.

JUNE 25TH

Common Nighthawk at backyard off Hammond Bay Road.

JUNE 27TH

4 Turkey Vultures off Metral Drive.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR JULY

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

July 9th and July 23rd

South Nanaimo to Duncan

July 2nd and July 16th

JULY is

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
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			S			
20			N National Moth Week			26
National Tree Day	World Nature Conservation Day		G			

Wild About Wildlife Month

LOCAL FIELD NATURALIST GROUPS

[Nature Nanaimo](#) | [Arrowsmith Naturalists](#) | [Comox Valley Nature](#) | [Cowichan Valley Naturalist Society](#) | [Malaspina Naturalists](#) | [Rocky Point Bird Observatory](#) | [Saltspring Trail & Nature Club](#) | [Victoria Natural History Society](#) | [Yellowpoint Ecological Society](#)

