



R. Hocken

Birding IN THE Backyard

NOVEMBER 2025

WHAT A CREEP(ER)

BY DAVE

British Columbia is home to a tiny, tree-hugging, non-migratory bird known as a Brown Creeper. Brown Creepers have slim, little bodies and a long, spine-tipped tail. Their bill is long, and curves down to make it easier to find their preferred food sources. They have a brown and buff streaked back to blend better with bark, buffy eyebrows, and creamy white undersides.

At just over 12.5 cm, these typically mottled brown and cream wee birds can easily be overlooked against bark as they spiral up trees hunting for insects and spiders to eat. They use their long, down-curved, slim beaks to probe cracks and pick away at the bark, looking for their prey.

While not typically a backyard bird, you may spot them if you live adjacent to their forest habitat and have mature trees in your yard. Some of their preferred species are Oak, Douglas Fir, Western Larch, Pine, and Maple. Watch for their short, jerky movements as they spiral up the trees, using their tail for a support. They usually only go up tree trunks, and will actually fly back down to crawl up again.

Smooth barked trees with thinner trunks simply aren't worth their effort, as they are not as easy to climb, and don't provide adequate camouflage, or enough prey.

There are two common backyard birds that may be confused for a creeper; the Bewick's Wren, and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Bewick's Wrens are slightly larger than the Brown Creepers, about 13cm in size.

They're plump little birds with a gently curved beak, rusty brown back, cream-white undersides, and dark tail bars. Note the bold white stripe above their eye to correctly identify them. Bewick's Wrens often hold their tail upright, flicking it back and forth. They're very active, vocal birds.



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Red-breasted Nuthatches have a very similar body shape to the Brown Creepers, though they're a bit smaller, usually about 11cm. They're a compact bird with a short, sharp bill, blue-gray back and rusty underparts. Nuthatches have a black cap and eye stripe paired with a white eyebrow, cheek, and chin. They also have a very short tail.

Red-breasted Nuthatches can be found at feeders, enjoying sunflower seeds, peanuts, and suet. Known as the upside down bird, nuthatches can be found going down, up, and sideways around tree trunks in search of a meal.

If it is a creeper that you see in your yard, you can try smearing small blobs of spreadable suet on the trunks of your trees, or tucking grubs into the crevices of bark to have the birds come back for more. Nuthatches will also appreciate this little snack!

AMERICAN ROBIN VS VARIED THRUSH

AMERICAN ROBIN (LEFT) AND VARIED THRUSH (RIGHT)



AMERICAN ROBIN
—R. HOCKEN

THE MALE AMERICAN ROBIN is North America's largest thrush, with a bright orange breast with a grayer back and a dark head. Their bill is yellow and their eye is dark with a broken white eye ring. They also have white feathers under their tail.

THE MALE VARIED THRUSH is a large, stocky thrush with a dark, rounded head and a straight bill. Their back is a blue-gray and they have a burnt orange chest marked with a black chest band. They have an orange stripe over their dark eye, and some orange barring in their wings.

While robins are more likely to be found wandering around your yard, Varied Thrush may visit feeders full of black oil sunflower and white millet.



VARIED THRUSH
—R. HOCKEN

WHY JOIN PROJECT FEEDERWATCH?

BY KELSEY

Project FeederWatch is a unique monitoring program that utilizes citizen science (that's you!) to provide a detailed picture of winter bird distribution in North America. With the massive amounts of data submitted every year, scientists are able to piece together highly accurate population maps of birds' winter ranges.

By analyzing that data that you provide, they can not only determine where birds are or aren't, but also spot continual declines in bird species. Once the decline is noted, the data can be used to help pinpoint potential reasons for it, and scientists can recommend strategies to help the population recover before the point of no return.

Now, if they're already getting so much data, why should you participate?

First of all, it's fun! And a great excuse to settle yourself somewhere comfy and watch birds for as long as you like. The schedule is completely flexible, meaning you can participate as much or as little as you like between November and April, and upload it through the app or online.

Secondly, all observations are important! Every tiny bit of data contributes to scientists understanding of North American birds. The information gathered by participants provides bird population data that isn't detected by other methods in use today.

Not only population maps, but FeederWatch data can also help provide insights into dominance hierarchies in wild birds, show the timing and extend of winter irruptions, note if ranges are expanding or shrinking, give us insight into what food sources and environments are favourable to wild birds, and help us gather information on how diseases may spread at bird feeders.

Join Project FeederWatch by donating any amount through Birds Canada, and help provide invaluable information that can help us and our wild birds.



M. Hamilton

Cedar Bird Feeders

Despite the name, Project FeederWatch doesn't *actually* require a feeder to watch...but it can't hurt!

Check out our selection of locally crafted, western red cedar bird feeders.

All our cedar feeders have a double-layered mesh base that allows air to circulate and water to drain out of the feeder, helping to keep seed drier.

Open trays starting at \$18.99 ea.



ARE YOU READY FOR WINTER?

BY KELSEY

It's starting to feel like fall, and before long winter will be here. Before the freezing temperatures arrive, there are a few things you can do to make sure your backyard is ready.

It's the perfect time of the year to clean out your nest boxes. Whether you're making sure they are ready for next year or repurposing them as winter roosting boxes, the first step is to make sure there's no debris or old nests in the box.

Over the winter, any materials left inside the box can absorb moisture and create a real mess. It also makes a great home for parasites and other bugs that can potentially deter birds from using it, or cause them harm.

Make sure the box is clean, with no spiderwebs, nests or other debris left behind. Sometimes, you can open the box to discover that a wasps nest has been built, or started, in the box, which can be a serious problem for birds.

If you spot the remains or beginnings of a wasps nest, remove it from the box and rub a bar of soap around the top where they're likely to try and adhere the nest to. The soap remains left in the box where you rubbed make it waxy, and stops the nest from being able to attach to the wood.

Once debris is removed, check the box for mold. Moldy boxes can be cleaned with a 1 to 9 bleach-water solution and scrubbed hard. If the mold persists, it's probably time to replace your box altogether. Mold spores can affect birds' lungs, same as ours, and boxes with persistent mold inside shouldn't be used.

If you decide to leave your nest box up over the winter, we recommend adding a layer of wood shavings into the bottom in case a bird or small flock needs a place to roost for the night.

Another thing to consider during the winter is your bird bath. Concrete bird baths should be put away for the winter, as the concrete can break or crack when hit with a heavy frost or freezing temperatures. Covering the bath or storing the basin out of the weather can make sure your concrete bath lasts many more years.

If you really want to continue offering water during the winter, which is helpful to overwintering birds, use a cheap plastic dish or tray instead of your concrete bath. The plastic usually holds up pretty well in the cold, and is a lot less expensive to replace if it does break or crack.

If you've got an outdoor plug, you can also add a bird bath heater to any bird bath to stop the freezing temperatures from potentially cracking your bath, and give your birds a nice place to bathe.

Have you been doing any pruning lately, or had some branches fall from a wind storm? It's the perfect material for building a brush pile. Loosely pile small branches to give birds a place to perch, then use longer limbs to create the teepee shape around them, and cover with evergreens. Leave a single entrance hole so birds can get in and out, and you have a simple, easy way to give your backyard birds temporary shelter from the weather or visiting predators.

Some birds, like the Steller's Jay, can also use brush piles as a place to cache their seeds for the winter.

Haven't gotten around to cleaning up your garden this fall? We totally understand. And we have good news...now you don't have to! Any flowers have gone to seed, and are a great source of food for your backyard birds this winter. Ground-feeding birds like Dark-eyed Juncos, Spotted Towhees, and Song Sparrows, among others, will appreciate this easy access energy source.

With the changing of seasons comes changes in backyard birds, and what you can do to help them. Remember to always clean your feeders and the ground underneath them regularly, especially during the wet season!



CHRISTMAS CARDS

Available in store.

A variety of adorable, fun, and unique patterns available in both boxed sets and single cards.



DID YOU KNOW?

Though some birds don't migrate south for winter, they will move up and down in elevation depending on where food is most abundant.



MASON BEE COCOONS IN WINTER

BY KELSEY



D. Veljacic

BASIC STEPS FOR CLEANING YOUR MASON BEE COCOONS

Open nesting block and gently remove cocoons using a specialized tool or No. 2 pencil eraser.

If using tubes, soak in cool water for about an hour before unraveling the tubes to remove the bees.

Place cocoons in cool water and swish them around to rinse dirt and pests off.

Rinse in very weak bleach-water solution, to get any remaining pests or parasites.

Optional—Candle & check for parasitized cocoons.

[What to look for when candling.](#)

Clean nesting blocks (if you use them), or replace tubes if you don't.

Store viable cocoons away for the winter.

With the summer very obviously over, it's the perfect time to make sure your mason bees are ready for the coming spring. Though mason bee season is usually over in July, we recommend waiting until late fall or early winter before doing anything with the cocoons, to ensure they've had time to grow.



By now they've hatched, developed, and spun themselves into a cocoon to lay dormant until spring. Once the cocoons are spun and the bees dormant, it's safe to pop them out of the nesting block or single use tubes for cleaning and storing.

Though cleaning the cocoons isn't a required part of having a mason bee condo, we do recommend it. There are few things worse than getting a bunch of mason bee cocoons, only for your bees to be decimated due to pests in a single season.

Cleaning your mason bee cocoons during the off season helps to keep their population healthy and remove pests like pollen mites or parasitic wasps before they become a big problem.

For single use tubes, soak the tubes in cool water for an hour or so to make them easier to unravel. Once the cocoons are out, dispose of the used tubes and replace with fresh, unused ones.

If you're using reusable nesting trays, they should be cleaned out and sanitized after every mason bee season, to ensure pollen mites and other pests don't take over. Most blocks are easily taken apart for cleaning and cocoon removal. When purchasing a bee condo, check to make sure the trays pop apart to save yourself some grief later.

Once your block is apart and your bee cocoons have been removed, scrape out any gunk left behind and rinse until they look clean. Spray the blocks liberally with a bleach-water solution (1 to 9 ratio) and allow to air dry.

If using wooden blocks, put the block together and tape tightly into position while still wet to limit the potential for warping.

Once dry, tightly tape the blocks back together and store away for the off season. By taping the blocks, you make sure they're tight together and there aren't any gaps for pests and parasites to enter through.

Cleaned cocoons can be stored in a cool, dry location to wait out the winter season. Make sure to store them somewhere with airflow, as the bees inside still need to breathe.

We recommend leaving them out of a refrigerated space if possible. Only move them to the door of a fridge, with a damp paper towel or glass of water to keep them from drying out, if the season is close and you don't want them awake just yet.

Garages, carports, sheds, or other unheated, sheltered areas work just as well to keep them dormant, without the risk of accidentally causing them harm.

You can also leave them outside, but you do run the risk of a bird or other critter deciding they look like a great winter snack.



Mason Bee Cocoons

Cocoons are usually available mid-February, please contact the store to be put on our short list for a call when they come in.

Mason bees are an excellent early spring pollinator for fruit trees and other early flowering plants.

When putting out your mason bee cocoons, leave them in the white cardboard box they come in. Open the flap on the box to reveal the round hole they use as an exit, and place the box on or near your mason bee house. When the bees hatch out, they will return to lay their eggs in the nearby tubes.



FEEDING HUMMINGBIRDS

BY KELSEY

Winter is a perfect time of the year to have a hummingbird feeder going.

Cold temperatures and snow can affect access to natural food sources and lead birds, including hummingbirds, to seek out backyard feeders to help them make it through.

An old wives' tale advises people to bring their hummingbirds feeders in before the winter, as it was thought that having the food available would be what kept the birds around instead of migrating south, but that isn't true. Of our two native species, one is migratory and will leave, feeders or no feeders.

The other is a non-migratory species that will stay here no matter what you do. So you might as well feed them!

The non-migratory Anna's hummingbirds can benefit greatly from safe, reliable access to backyard hummingbird feeders, but just how do you keep the nectar available through the freezing temperatures?

One simple solution is to add a hummingbird feeder warmer. The warmer hooks on to your existing feeder and uses a low wattage incandescent lightbulb to keep just enough heat going to help stop the nectar from freezing. The warmers do rely on electricity, so you'd need access to an outdoor plug, but they also save you from waking up at sunrise to put your defrosted feeder back outside.

If you don't have an outdoor plug, there's also a new thermos-like hummingbird feeder. Simply pour hot water into the insulated base of the feeder, and pop the nectar reservoir on top. The warmth from the water helps to slow down the freezing of the nectar solution, and it can be set on a table or surface, or hung where your usual feeder would be.



K. Bosch

Warmers aren't your only solution for keeping your hummingbirds well fed during the winter, though they may be the easiest.

One trick is to fill multiple feeders, switching the one outside for a defrosted one from inside as necessary, and leaving the frozen one to defrost until it's needed again. This does require someone being around and paying attention to your feeders, but it's workable.

Bringing your feeder inside at night, and putting it back out at dawn is also recommended. Hummingbirds won't visit overnight but they'll definitely be looking for a drink once the sun starts coming up. Having a nice, unfrozen feeder available early can be super helpful for them.

Another trick involves moving the feeder, especially if it's hanging out in the open with little protection from the elements. Moving it somewhere under cover, or closer to your house, can give the feeder some protection from the cold weather and slow down the freezing process, even if only slightly.

For any of these solutions, we would also recommend insulating your feeder somehow. Wrapping the bottle in bubble wrap or a woolen sock, or other insulating material, can help hold any heat in and keep the cold weather at bay. Pair the insulating material with items like hand warmers for a little extra warmth.

Winter can also be a great time to try out a hand held hummingbird feeder. Visiting hummingbirds, with less natural food available, are more likely to take risks they may not during warmer weather.

Before you put your usual feeder outside in the morning, fill the hand held feeder with nectar and go stand where you'd hang your feeder, and wait.

We recommend staying as still as possible, so be sure to dress warm!



INSULATED HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER

Designed for both hot and cold weather, the Anna's Healthy Hummingbird feeder includes a vacuum insulated chamber underneath an 8oz. nectar reservoir.

Fill the chamber with hot water during the winter to help slow down freezing, or cold water or ice during the summer to help slow down fermentation. Hang the feeder using the included hanging ring, or let it sit on a flat surface and enjoy the hummingbirds all year long.

\$54.99 ea.



BIRD WALKS

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

All bird walks are weather permitting and cancellations are posted to our blog the morning of around 8:00 a.m.

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.

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).

All experience levels welcome.

Bring your own binoculars, when possible, and decent walking shoes 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

November 11th, *Remembrance Day*: CLOSED

December 24th, *Christmas Eve*: REDUCED HOURS
TBD

December 25th, *Christmas Day*: CLOSED

December 26th, *Boxing Day*: CLOSED

BIRD SIGHTINGS

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

OCTOBER 3RD

20 Sandhill Cranes at Highway 19 & Grovehill Road.
Snipe at a pond on Grovehill Road.

OCTOBER 8TH

White-throated Sparrow in a backyard near Horne Lake.

OCTOBER 19TH

Western Kingbird in Qualicum by the golf course.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR NOVEMBER

North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

November 12th and November 26th

South Nanaimo to Duncan

November 5th and November 19th

NOVEMBER is

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Adopt a Turkey 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](#)

CONTACT US

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