



K. MacDonald

# Birding IN THE Backyard

**FEBRUARY 2026**

## NATIONAL BIRD FEEDING MONTH

BY KELSEY

February is the perfect time to show your backyard birds some extra love and care. Since 1994, February has been designated National Bird Feeding Month. As one of the most difficult months for wild birds, it's intended to highlight the struggles our wild birds face in the cold, often snowy weather (not that we've seen much of that this year!).

With the unpredictable weather in full swing, it can be difficult for backyard birds to find food, shelter, and water. National Bird Feeding Month encourages everyone to put out a little something to help the birds survive and thrive all year round. With how plentiful the chickadees have been this year, chances are it's a low year for natural sources. That means they are more likely to visit backyard feeders!

One option is high energy snacks, like sunflower seeds, peanut halves, and high-value suet blocks. We recommend using chipped sunflower seeds, to both keep mess down and make it easier for your birds to access the food. Anything in a shell they pick by weight, choosing the heaviest, most rewarding seeds first, and then they still have to crack it open.

Peanut halves may not attract all seed-eating birds the way sunflower chips will, but they're still a high energy, high protein treat for many backyard birds including chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers. You can also break the peanuts into smaller chunks to appeal to juncos and other sparrows.



Suet is, of course, always a great choice. Choosing suet with a minimum 6% crude protein value gives your birds the energy boost they need when the temperature drops. Look for suet with plenty of peanuts, peanut butter, and insects for that extra bit of protein.



Other than food, having an accessible water source can sometimes be overlooked during cold weather. After all, it's wet and rainy so often, isn't there plenty of water around?

Well, there is. The only problem is it's often frozen and inaccessible for wild birds, who need it not only for drinking but also to bathe in. Birds bathe even in cold weather to help keep their feathers in tip-top shape, which helps with heat retention.

Birds can also benefit from the addition of sheltered areas. Whether it's a full on roosting box or you decide to plant a few evergreen shrubs, they appreciate having somewhere safe to roost out of direct weather.

Though these are all things you can have going year round, National Bird Feeding Month emphasizes the greater need during the winter, encouraging everyone to put out a little something extra for our backyard birds during this time.

# ANNA'S VS RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

## ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (LEFT) AND RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (RIGHT)



ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD  
—J. MORRISON

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRDS** are a year round resident of Vancouver Island. The males' have a rosy-pink throat and crown that may appear black in dim lighting. They have a straight, relatively short bill and broad tail that extends beyond their wings when perched. Their body is mostly green with some gray in the lower belly and chest.

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS** have a slender bill that curves slightly down, and fairly short wings. They are a bright green or gold-green on their back and crown with white-gray underparts. The males' brilliant red throat is paired with a black facemask and green crown.

The ranges of the Anna's and Ruby-throated do not overlap, with the Ruby-throated seen east of the Rocky Mountains and the Anna's on the west coast.



RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD  
—M. TILLET (FLICKR)



R. Hocken

## THINK SPRING—IT'S COMING

BY KELSEY

Though the weather remains cold...ish, spring is still coming up fast and it's probably about time we started thinking about it.

Our mason bee cocoons will be available starting February 12th. If you need to supplement your stock from last year, or are just getting started, swing by and pick up a box of cocoons born and raised in Courtenay.

Make sure your bees are stored somewhere cool, with decent airflow, and protected from potential predators like woodpeckers. Boxes should be filled with fresh tubes, if you use the tubes, or clean blocks if you chose the reusable blocks.

We don't recommend storing your bees in the fridge unless temperatures are warm enough for them to emerge, and the fruit trees haven't begun to blossom yet so they would have no food sources.

Speaking of cleaning things out, what do your nest boxes look like? Make sure they're free of mold, spiderwebs, and other debris that may turn off visiting birds.

The boxes could be used for roosting during the off season, but as temperatures begin to warm they should be double checked to make sure they're prepped for new nests.

Once the temperatures warm up, it'll be time for a new application of nematodes. If you've had crows or raccoons ripping up your lawn, chances are they've found some delicious grubs.

If you don't feel like a repeat this year, adding beneficial nematodes to prey on the grubs before they're big enough to attract the crows can help solve the problem. Plus, they're a natural, microscopic worm that poses no risk to people, plants, or animals when used in your lawn!

Also remember to keep an eye out for the Rufous hummingbirds, who should be returning for their breeding season as we head into March. Slightly smaller than the Anna's, the Rufous are a more orange-y brown in colour and may visit feeders, especially those near the woodland areas they prefer.

### Mason Bee Supplies

Our reusable wooden blocks are locally crafted with a plexiglass top, so you can take a peek at how your bees are developing without disturbing them.

Single use cardboard tubes are simple to use, and should be replaced every year with fresh tubes.

Condos are available for use with the blocks and tubes, and are crafted locally on Vancouver Island.



# NESTING SEASON IS COMING

BY COLIN

As we anticipate the arrival of spring, it's a great time to get your nest boxes ready.

Soon, the chickadees and wrens will begin to search out and establish territories to begin nesting. Before they do so, it's best to get your nest boxes prepared and up, in the hopes that they'll choose it to nest in.

Now, not all birds will use a nest box. The Anna's hummingbird, for example, builds a ridiculously small cup-shaped nest in shrubs or trees, camouflaged by lichen. Despite the market for hummingbird nest boxes, they are merely decoration and won't be used.

Another bird that doesn't use a box is the Dark-eyed Junco, who are often found nesting in a depression in the ground, in tangled tree roots, or even in hanging baskets.

Birds that can use nest boxes include Bewick's Wrens, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Tree Swallows, Violet-green Swallows, woodpeckers, and some less desirable visitors like the European Starling and House Sparrow.

These birds are what's known as cavity nesters, meaning they'll naturally build their nests inside cavities made by woodpeckers or other creatures. Some, such as the woodpeckers, will excavate the cavity themselves for use.

Because they already use cavities, these birds can be attracted to nest boxes, though there's no guarantee they'll use it immediately if you put one up.

When choosing a nest box, there are a few things to think about to pick the one best suited for your birds and their needs.

First of all, the entrance hole. This determines what birds are actually able to get inside, from nesting birds to predators. Keeping the hole as small as possible, while still allowing your local birds inside, helps keep the young safe.

A one inch entrance hole allows chickadees and wrens to nest inside, upping the size to 1 1/8 inches includes nuthatches. To attract swallows, the entrance hole should be around 1 1/2 inches in size, but that can also allow nuisance birds or predators entry. To combat this, you can switch from a round hole to an oval or egg-shaped hole of around 7/8 inches tall by 3 1/2 inches wide.

For woodpeckers, the hole size ranges from 1 1/4 inches for the little Downy to 2 1/2 inches for Northern Flickers.

Besides the size, you should also consider how far from the bottom of the box it will sit. Chickadee and swallow boxes should have an entrance hole 5 or 6 inches above the floor of the box, and Northern Flicker boxes should be around 10 to 12 inches off the floor.

The size of the floor also determines the amount of energy and work required to build a nest. Too big, and it's not worth the amount of time and effort, so they'll look elsewhere.

Chickadees, nuthatches and wrens should have a floor of 4x4 inches to 5x5 inches. Swallows prefer a 5x5 inch floor, and the Northern Flicker box should be 8x8 inches in size.

Ventilation in nest boxes is very important. A common way to add ventilation is simply to drill rows of small holes on the side of the box, near to the roof.

Another thing to consider? Cleaning. Being able to clean out old nests, debris, or wasps' nests is important if you want a bird to use the box. Making sure your box has an easily accessible way to clean it out can save you tons of grief later.

Remember to check your nest box every year, even if you never saw it get used. Some birds will fill unused cavities with debris to keep other birds from nesting in their territory, or it could have been used as a roosting box during chilly weather.

Ensure your box is clean, set up, and ready for tenants before the end of February for the best chance of it being used.



## BIRD NESTING SUPPLIES



From locally made nest boxes for common cavity nesting birds to nesting fluff and predator guards, we carry a variety of materials to help encourage birds to nest in your backyard.



S. Jack



### DID YOU KNOW?

Woodpecker boxes should be filled with woodchips to allow them to mimic the cavity excavation they would do in a tree trunk (or the side of your house) for nesting?



# HUMMINGBIRD EVOLUTION

BY KELSEY



S. Petersen

## OTHER SPECIES CHANGES IMPACTED BY HUMANS

Great Tits in the UK have slightly longer bills than in other locations, likely due to an abundance of bird feeders.

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2017-10-20-british-birds-adapt-their-beaks-birdfeeders>

Dark-eyed Juncos at the University of California evolved to have a different bill shape during the pandemic shutdown, and returned to their previous shape once the shutdown ended.

<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/bird-beaks-changed-shape-during-pandemic-junco>

Peppered Moths grew darker due to air pollution during the industrial revolution.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/new-evidence-peppered-moths-changed-color-sync-industrial-revolution-180959282/>

Urban Raccoons are evolving shorter snouts to fit the available food supply in urban areas.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12983-025-00583-1>

The Anna's hummingbird was originally a native species of Mexico up into southern California, where they fed on the year-round nectar sources. In the early 1900s, the Anna's range began to expand up the coast until today, where you can find year round populations all the way up into Alaska.

As their population grew, their range expanded, but what caused the sudden jump in Anna's hummingbirds? Scientists thought that eucalyptus trees, an introduced species with some winter flowering varieties, had something to do with it.

Another probable cause? Hummingbird feeders!

Bird bills, and especially hummingbird bills, developed alongside their preferred food sources, in what's called a *coevolutionary relationship*.

With the new availability of winter-flowering eucalyptus and hummingbird feeders where natural sources could be scarcer, the Anna's population was able to grow rapidly and expand while still finding abundant food sources as they moved northward.

When hummingbirds drink nectar, their forked, fringed tongues collect the nectar and retract into the bill, which squeezed the nectar out for the bird to swallow. It's believed that the advantage of these longer billed hummingbirds is that the tongue doesn't have to retract as far to release the nectar, meaning the birds can lap up the sugar-water faster.

With natural flowers, this quicker lap rate doesn't matter due to the small amount of nectar available per flower. For feeders, however, with their much greater reservoir, increasing the speed of nectar-gathering can be very useful.

The longer bill may also contribute to the amount of nectar per lap, increasing the volume of nectar consumed even further.

Scientists studying this bill change looked at preserved hummingbird specimens from museums in order to track the changes, finding that in areas with hummingbird feeders the bills did increase in size in areas with prolific hummingbird feeders.

They also discovered that the Anna's bills *decreased* in size for those birds that moved into colder areas as their range expanded, likely to help conserve heat.

Another notable change is the male's bill. In areas rife with feeders, his bill changed shape to increase his fighting power; growing sharper to help him defend his territory.

And all these changes are happening, on an evolutionary scale, very quickly. Changes were happening within 20 years, or roughly 10 generations of hummingbirds.

Scientists believe that more examples of evolutionary changes are going to be seen going forwards, as more species are being shaped indirectly by humans.



M. Hamilton

## Bottle Style Hummingbird Feeders

New designs include an ant moat.

A variety of gorgeous designs, they make an excellent gift for yourself or a loved one.

Starting at \$38.99ea.



# I TAKE THIS WING TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

BY IVY-LYNNE

When thinking about romance this Valentine's Day, I'm assuming that most people envision the usual. Maybe a nice candlelit dinner or a moonlight stroll down the beach. What I'm positive no one thinks about are Wood-feeding cockroaches.

Wood-feeding cockroaches, also known as *Salganea Taiwenensis*, are a very particular sort of cockroach. They are especially unique regarding their mating habits and rituals. For one thing, wood-feeding cockroaches are entirely monogamous.

Once they find their mate, they do not stray. This is something rare within the insect kingdom, though not unheard of as it has also been known to occur amongst certain species of termites and burying beetles.

Wood-feeding cockroaches also engage in an activity known as *nuptial feeding*. This process (also referred to by academics as sexual cannibalism) is not wholly uncommon amongst insects. In fact, you've probably heard of it before if you've ever spent any time learning about the praying mantis, or the black widow.

Nuptial feeding usually occurs between a female and her mate. Typically, this ritual is perpetuated by the female, and results in the death of the male. Scientists have found several reasons for this admittedly violent behavior, where their mate, or at least parts of him, are consumed.

For example, there might be essential nutrients gained from the action, important for the female's development as she produces offspring.

The nuptial feeding that wood-feeding cockroaches take part in however, though cannibalistic, differs drastically from its more murderous counterpart.

To understand the way wood-feeding cockroaches copulate, a scientist affiliated with the University of Japan collected a few and paired them off into twenty-four couples.

The roaches, both male and female, took turns eating each others' wings. Twelve of the twenty-four pairs ate their partners wings completely. What baffled scientists the most is that there seems to be no concrete reason for the behaviour, as the wings possess no significant nutritional value.

However, they do have theories, mostly revolving around potential benefits outside of those typically associated with nuptial feeding behaviours.

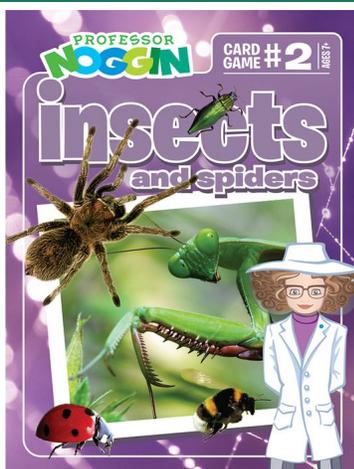
For example, one theory considers that the ritual wing-eating assists the roaches in maintaining what is known as 'true monogamy' (only copulating with one partner for the rest of their lives), as it physically makes it more difficult for the insects to stray and engage in 'betrayal behaviour'.

Not only are wood feeding cockroaches completely monogamous, which is a rarity, but what is even more unusual about these cockroaches is the fact that they raise their offspring *biparentally*.

Within the rotten wood log where wood-feeding cockroaches make their home, there is a 'gallery' in which they raise their young together. This is quite unique, particularly amongst insects. Like the process of wing eating, there is no real agreed upon scientific reason for why wood-feeding cockroaches would do so, and yet they do.

Whatever the reasons for this strange, oddly sweet behavior exhibited by the wood-feeding cockroaches, one thing is clear, if a cockroach can be this romantic, you better step it up this Valentine's Day.

I'm not saying you should eat each other's wings, (or whatever the human equivalent of that is) but more than a card might be nice.



## INSECTS & SPIDERS CARD GAME

The second in a series of educational card games for kids, *Insects and Spiders* teaches interesting facts about the subject with a variety of trivia, multiple choice, and true/false questions. Check out this and their other games in store!

\$12.99 ea.



# BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to [thebirdstore.blogspot.com](http://thebirdstore.blogspot.com).

**Bird walks are on pause for the winter months and will resume in February with exact dates TBD.**

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. They also go on pause during the winter (December & January), resuming in early February.

There's no charge for our bird walks, and they are designed to conclude before lunch, averaging roughly 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

February 16th, *Family Day*: CLOSED

# BIRD SIGHTINGS

Report bird sightings by emailing [birding@thebackyard.ca](mailto:birding@thebackyard.ca) or calling 250-390-3669

### JANUARY 11TH

*Leucistic/Albino Glaucus Winged Gull* at the Bowen Road Cemetery.

### JANUARY 13TH

*American Kestrel* at the Englishman River Estuary.

### JANUARY 21ST

*Summer Tanager* at Willow Road, Qualicum Beach.

## DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR MONTH

### North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley

February 11th and February 25th

### South Nanaimo to Duncan

February 4th and February 18th

February						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
1			S			
			N			The Great Backyard Bird Count
	<b>CLOSED</b>		S			
			N	G		

## 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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