



Chickadee Chat

September Newsletter 2011

Just a Thought.....

Storms, floods, drought, cold; all different blends of our crazy 2011 weather. Whether it is a trend or a fluke or if we are on the top of the roller coaster waiting to head down remains to be seen. How this will affect people is always talked about but how will this affect our birds?

Bird populations are on a steady decline, due to many different factors. Even some common birds are becoming notably absent. The barn swallow is a good example. Some of my earliest memories are of sneaking into the barn to peer up at the mud nests and the gapping mouths of the new brood of swallows. Or of getting hay either in or out of the barn and ducking as the parents nervously swooped overhead. Today, barn swallow numbers are down a staggering **70%** and it is unclear if they will be present in 20 years. Many people did not see their rufous hummingbirds arrive this spring. Was it due to the unseasonably long and cold spring that saw few flowers available for them or is there a more sinister reason? Even at our property, where we always have both calliope and rufous hummingbirds, the calliope was absent and the rufous numbers were down.



Faced with such uncertainty regarding our birds' fate, it is sometimes difficult to see if anything can make a difference. But studies have also shown how bird feeding and backyard habitats can make a local difference. Feeding birds all year, not just in winter, can make a huge impact. This year, in our own yard, we have seen how much the juvenile birds have flocked to the feeders. Young birds are poor fliers and inexperienced in finding food - the presence of a bird feeder that their parents fed them from offers them a "security blanket" as they become more adept at feeding themselves. (And don't forget, they are a hoot to watch!)

So feed and treasure your birds. If we are on top of the roller coaster, let's try and enjoy the view - and take as long as possible to reach the bottom.



News Bites



- 1] Our Daily Savings Club (DSC) is a great way to receive all your seed and suet at **15% off** for the **entire year!** Membership is **\$25**. During that year, you will also receive an additional **5% off** during seed sales and a **\$10 "Bird Buck"** in store coupon when you spend an accumulated \$200. Join now!
- 2] Our new website (www.wbu.com/fraservalley) is being constantly updated. Be sure to check our our new layout and information pages on our new products. We also have a gallery page where you can submit your own photos of your favourite birds. We would love to see them! Email photos to cwjury@shaw.ca.
- 3] Due to the high cost of postage, we are sending fewer items through the mail. By signing up to get your newsletter by email, you will also receive coupons to unadvertised monthly specials such as feeder swaps.

Red-Breasted Nuthatch

Wandering through the woods, you always hear certain sounds: the wind whispering through the leaves, the scratch and clatter of branches brushing against each other, the distant call of hawks and other birds, the sound of a tinny toy horn. Tinny toy horn? You must have stumbled across a red-breasted nuthatch.



The nasal “yank-yank-yank” is usually how you find a nuthatch; you will always hear one long before you see one. A red-breasted nuthatch is a small (4.3” or 11 cm long) bird found in the northern woods, particularly spruce, fir, pine or cedar forests. They have a round shape with a long pointed bill (slightly curved at the tip), no neck, short tail and broad, short wings. Both sexes have the same markings - blue-grey back, black cap, white stripe over the eye, black line running through the eye from the bill to the back of the head, rich, rusty-brown body - but the female is much paler with a smaller black eye mark. Nuthatches are often seen in the company of woodpeckers, chickadees and kinglets.

These birds are very quick at foraging, moving up, down and sideways on tree trunks. You will most often see them going upside down on the trunks, probing for food underneath the bark and other small crevices. The nuthatches are able to move in ways most birds can't because of the large claw on one backyard pointing toe on each foot. This, along with the short tail, can anchor and stabilize the bird. Favourite foods are seeds from conifers and insects, especially in the summer. All types of bugs, beetles, caterpillars and spiders are either eaten or taken back to the nest to feed the young. As they are year-round residents of BC, caching (hiding food for use at a later time) for the winter is very important. It normally begins in August and continues through the late fall. Nuthatches will hide their food by shoving it into either bark crevices or underneath the bark itself, covering it with lichen, pebbles or more bark to hide it from “thieves” like jays. They are also an irruptive species when there is a food shortage during nesting season, moving south as they search for pine seeds.



Nuthatches form a monogamous pair but still perform a courtship dance each year. The male begins by turning his back to the female and swaying slowly side to side with his crest feathers raised. They may also do a “slow glide” together as well as courtship feeding. It is nice that the male is so attentive during this ritual because once it is done, the work begins for the female. She chooses the nesting site and does much of the excavation - but at least the male feeds her while she is working! The preferred nesting site is either a dead or partially

dead conifer or a broken tree snag. It takes 18 days to dig out the hole between 2.5”-8” deep. The nest is made of grass, bark strips and pine needles lined with softer grasses, feathers and shredded bark. Once built, the nuthatches apply resin balls to the outside entrance to deter either competitors or predators. A single brood, consisting of 2-8 eggs, is raised each year. Both parents raise the young, which fledge 18-21 days after hatching. Fledglings are still fed for the first several weeks before they venture out on their own.

Nuthatches can be seen at feeders where they enjoy black oil sunflower, suet, Bark Butter, skinless peanuts and nuts. They often behave like chickadees while feeding, weighing each seed before eating to ensure they find the heaviest one. You will also see a nuthatch carry food away to crack it open by hammering at it with their bill. While feeding in groups, they become very talkative, chattering to each other with weak, rapid nasal notes.



Interesting Facts

- Nuthatches will use pieces of bark to smear resin around the nest rather than get their bills gummy.
- They are one of the few non-woodpecker birds to excavate their own nest from solid wood.
- For more interesting facts, see our “Bird of the Month” page on our website.

New Products

Joining WBU has certainly given us access to many new and unique products that will make your bird feeding more enjoyable.

Holscher Poles

Finally, a pole system that is as individual as you are! You can start with the basic boxed set that includes a ground stabilizer, a 48" base pole with an auger, a 48" extender pole, a double arm attachment and a chickadee finale and go from there. If you wish, you can make your system 9 feet tall with 6 different arms and attachments. Or you can get a metal pole that will hang your bird houses out of reach of cats and other predators, especially with the addition of a matching baffle. The perfect deck system is also possible as there are attachments for both wood and iron deck rails. And you can always add extra attachments for suet, hummingbird feeders or tube feeders, as well as additional arms as needed.



Seed Cylinders and Stackables

Looking for a new way to feed birds but don't want any mess? Stackables are the answer. This type of bird food comes in a variety of sizes and flavours (from nutty blend to peanut butter and jelly suet doughs) that have been compressed into blocks. There are a variety of cylinder holders to choose from that allow you to either place a single blend or several small stackables on a single feeder, giving your birds some variety. You will find that birds really love stackables and you will love this easy and clean feeding. Our front yard holds several feeders and it is filled with chickadees, woodpeckers and bushtits (and even the occasional Steller's Jay) enjoying the different flavours. If rain or squirrels threaten, we recommend using a large 20" squirrel baffle. To the left is a picture of our immature downy enjoying a seed block in our front yard.



Another new feeding method is using a treat feeder. We carry two different types, a hanging feeder and one that can be mounted on a pole with a recycled plastic roof. The small compartments of these feeders allow you to use seed, Birdacious Blend suet nuggets or a Birdacious Bug Berry blend. The last blend is a yummy (if you are a bird!) mixture of sunflower chips, nuts, raisins, cranberries, blueberries and roasted mealworms.



Suet Blends

If you have been in the stores lately, you will have noticed the new suet flavours we now carry. Most people have a chuckle over feeding "peanut butter and jelly" suet to their birds but the birds really enjoy it! Other new flavours include Bug Bites, Naturally Nuts and Nuts and Berries. And don't fret, our old standbys of Nutty Butter and Peanut Butter suets are still available.



Eco-Clean Feeders

We must admit, this is the one product that made us want to join WBU because we HAD to have it. Anything that makes feeding in the wet weather healthier for the birds is a must for anyone who lives in a rain forest.

All Eco-Clean products have a material preservative that works to inhibit microbial damage on treated surfaces. These surfaces include any area that the seed may touch like tubes, trays and perches. The preservative will not wash or wear away. Care is easy due to the quick-clean technology on all tube feeders. Simply take apart, wash with warm, soapy water and let dry. These come in both seed and nyjer tubes and a 8.5" seed tray. You can also purchase Eco-Clean perch covers that can be used on your existing tube feeders

The dinner bell feeder is also an Eco-Clean product, allowing you to feed suet and seed cylinders as well as bird seed with the same level of protection.

But don't think that just because you have this wonderful new product that you don't need to clean your feeder. Dirt, dust and other debris from normal bird feeding activities will still coat the inside of the feeders and this dust can interfere with the preservative. As well, even the preservative will not keep seed that is soaking wet from spoiling. So keep your domes and tube brushes handy.

All Eco-Clean products are covered by a life time warranty.



New Seed Blends

It seems that everything in the store is getting a re-make, including our seed! The new seed blends available from WBU offer a larger variety of foods per blend, like fruits, berries and nuts, giving birds a more balanced diet. Calcium has also been added to most new mixes. Birds need calcium in their diet for strong bones and it is also important during nesting for egg development. And like the blends we have made in our stores for years, there are no fillers or cereal grains. We have always said we had the best bird seed in town and now it's even better.

The following new blends are available in our stores:

				
No Mess Plus Blend	No Mess Blend	Supreme LM Blend	Tree Nutty Plus Blend	Choice Plus Blend
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - brand new mix - includes sunflower chips, shelled peanuts, chopped tree nuts, peanut suet nuggets, cherries, cranberries and calcium carbonate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - brand new mix - includes sunflower chips, hulled millet, peanut pieces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - similar to our Fraser Valley and Chilliwack mixes - includes black oil sunflower, medium chips, white proso millet, striped sunflower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - brand new mix - includes shelled peanuts, tree nuts, coarse sunflower chips, black oil sunflower, striped sunflower, raisins, calcium carbonate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - brand new mix - includes black oil sunflower, medium chip, shelled peanuts, peanut nuggets, cherries, tree nuts, safflower, cranberries, striped sunflower and calcium carbonate

Jim's Birdacious Bark Butter



Bark Butter is another new item that birds just love. It is a uniquely spreadable suet that looks like whipped peanut butter and can be put on just about anything - trees, poles, feeders - that doesn't move. And every bird that tries it keeps coming back for more; the number of different species documented eating Bark Butter is over 100! We will be carrying some new feeders that are made just for Bark Butter so you offer this food and keep your trees clean. Squirrels too find it irresistible (our squirrels were licking the bark even after it was gone, just to get the last morsel!) so you may need to use either a Bark Butter feeder on a baffled pole or place it inside a cage.



Get Ready for Fall

Didn't I just write about getting ready for spring? Time certainly does fly so let's get ready for a new batch of birds.

1) Rain is coming (although this year it almost didn't leave!) so be prepared. Make sure your domes give adequate coverage. Change those feeders you can't protect from rain (make them your "fair weather" feeders) to ones you can. Try Feeder Fresh or the new Aspects Eco-Clean feeders to help deal with the effects of rain on seed.



2) The changing of the guard of the hummingbirds is happening. Most resident rufous hummers are gone, as well as most of the migrants. The Anna's hummingbirds will soon be moving back to take their place. Make sure your feeders are ready to go and your heating systems ready for the coming months. The picture to the right is a system that many customers have found to work well. And for any newbies out there, a hummingbird in October is no reason to panic!



3) Mason bee straws should be left outside until mid-late October for the pupae to mature properly. Then you can bring them into a frost free environment like a garage (put in a container so no one eats them) or a fridge. Place a moist toweltette in the container before placing them in the fridge so the bees don't dry out.

4) Get your last bit of housekeeping down before the rains arrive. Rake up and dispose of any debris, old seed, droppings, etc. from underneath your feeders. Move your pole system or feeders if the ground below needs a break. Give your feeders a good cleaning too.

5) Don't pack up your nyjer feeder. Even if your goldfinches have left, other birds like chickadees, house finches and even juncos will eat nyjer due to its high protein content. Just keep it protected with a dome and don't overfill your feeder during the rains. You can also use our new Finch Mix in the nyjer feeder over the winter - the mixture of fine chips and nyjer will be appreciated by your birds!



(Even though we don't have Whiskey Jacks here, I couldn't resist sharing this photo of a juvenile eating bark butter up at our property. What a face!)

The Latest in Birding News

One of the interesting benefits of joining WBU is that we now have access to the latest news in bird research. We always felt that the more information we gained and passed onto you, the more exciting this hobby would become for everyone. One of the most fascinating tidbits of information we received was regarding birds in winter.

Naturalists have known for some time that some birds store food for the winter and that birds feeders play an important role during this time. But until now, they never realized the full extent of this behaviour.

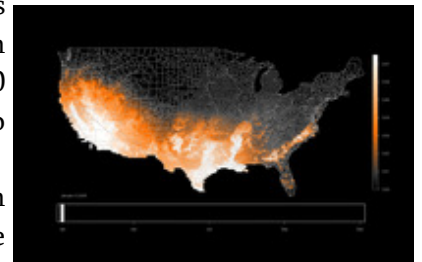
Thanks to micro-chip technology (the same chip that may be in your dog or cat as an identification tool), researchers have been able to track movements of individual



birds around feeders. They found that birds begin storing food in August, not October as previously thought. And because of this food caching, trips to bird feeders increase dramatically. The birds also do not wander - they lay claim to certain feeders and feed from those exclusively. This behavior continues throughout the winter months. The photo to the right shows a Whiskey Jack (Grey Jay), at our property in the Cariboo, taking a large amount of suet to hide for the winter. Just another reason why it is important to feed birds all year round!

Another interesting bit of research we learned was regarding tracking birds through eBird. eBird, for those who don't know, is an on-line birding site that lets you post your bird sightings and share them with others. But what eBird is doing with that data is amazing. They are using eBird stationary and travelling count lists of all reported species to construct STEM (Spatio-Temporal Exploratory Model) migration maps over the mainland USA. These maps plot bird movements over an entire year and are truly amazing to watch. Now you can see where our migratory birds actually travel to, like the Western Tanager or the Winter Wren. This gives researchers a new way to monitor populations and possibly determine future problems, such as the drainage of a wetland in an important bird stop over. As of this moment, eBird has done maps for 50 birds but their goal is to increase the maps to 200 birds and expand them to include Canada and Mexico, getting a picture of the full migration.

So we encourage anyone, whether birder or backyard nature lover, to join eBird and post your sightings. It all comes down to data - the more there is the more extensive the maps become. For more info go to www.ebird.org and click on Animated Occurrence maps.



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