

BACKYARD BIRDS



“Everyone likes birds. What wild creature is more accessible to our eyes and ears, as close to us and everyone in the world, as universal as a bird?”

– Sir David Attenborough



Do we need birds? Do birds matter?

Birds fascinate the human mind in ways that other animals cannot – their flight inspires us; their songs enliven us; their beauty and diversity transfix us; their presence often soothes us.

Birds matter. Likely you also believe that we **do** need birds. Birds are very important environmental indicators, helping us see the environmental impacts, negative or positive, of human activities that are either visible or undetectable to the human eye. The expression “canary in a coal mine” speaks directly to birds’ value as indicators of environmental quality. Changes in the health of individual birds, or in the health or size of entire populations of birds, provide us with important signals of environmental change.

What’s more, because bird watching and the collection of detailed bird observations have been common hobbies for many decades, we have the ability to see trends in environmental change by looking at changes in bird populations over time.

Birds matter also because they are all around us – as Sir Attenborough suggests, they are perhaps our best, universal connection to nature for this reason. *Can you imagine describing a spring morning to anyone without mentioning singing birds?* There are of course many other reasons why birds matter. But what really, truly matters is this: Why do birds matter to you? If you don’t yet know the answer, let us help you explore the question within our series of e-Books.



Cedar Waxwing

What you will learn in this e-Book

This e-Book will introduce you to fun audio vignettes of several bird species found in eastern Ontario, and in some case many other parts of Canada, that have been grouped together according to a certain theme. You’ll learn each species’ English and French common name, as well as a few fun facts, anecdotes or historical points about



them in the audio link. In addition you'll get a photo and verbal description of what each bird looks like, with some added tips to help you differentiate some lookalike species that are easily confused 'in the field'. Perhaps most importantly, an example of the song or call of each species and a description of its basic life history are provided in each audio vignette. This content is based on the popular CBC Ottawa program called "Tweet of the Week".

This e-Book highlights select songbirds commonly found close by, perhaps even in your own backyard:

(you can click on a bird's name to learn more)

- *American Goldfinch*
- *Black-capped Chickadee*
- *Cedar Waxwing*
- *Chipping Sparrow*
- *Downy Woodpecker*
- *House Finch*
- *House Sparrow*
- *Northern Cardinal*
- *Purple Finch*
- *Ruby-throated Hummingbird*
- *Song Sparrow*
- *White-breasted Nuthatch*

Birds and nearby nature



White-breasted Nuthatch

What is nearby nature? It's nature right where you live – the examples of nature can be found all around you, from the bee pollinating a flower in a planter box on your windowsill, to your backyard, to your community's park, to an overlooked meadow or patch of forest you pass on your daily commute.

Nearby nature isn't a substitute for the wild spaces we love, such as national parks or wild seascapes, but it is a place where we can connect with nature easily.

For many of us, the best expression of nearby nature is probably birds. Birds flit and fly from place to place through our human landscapes reminding us that, if we do things right, they can find sustenance and habitat in our built-up world. And to the amazement of many, the birds we encounter seasonally in the towns and cities of our country are winged ambassadors, travelling throughout the hemisphere from the far north to the far south, and all places in between.

Birds represent some of the most accessible wildlife with which we can interact in nearby nature. In this way, birds are a kind of 'gateway' creature to get people interested in the wildlife – and its habitat – that's found all around them. Birds remind us that we are not alone on this planet and that how we live can either help, or hinder, our wild neighbours.

It's wonderful that you are interested in learning more about bird species and please enjoy!





American Goldfinch

At the feeder, **American Goldfinches** are noisy and boisterous, and always appear to be squabbling with each other.

The **Black-capped Chickadee**, known in French as Mésange à tête noire, has the impressive ability to grow their brain by 30% in the fall to expand its spatial memory capacity and then shrinks it down to its normal size again in the spring.



Black-Capped Chickadee



Cedar Waxwing - Photographed by BJ Stacey

Local observations of this species occur year-round but peak from early June before dropping-off in mid-September. Look for **Cedar Waxwings** feasting on Sumac berries during the winter months.

The **Chipping Sparrow**, known in French as Bruant familier, has an accurate French name since the bird's song is very common in Ottawa's suburbs and parks.



Chipping Sparrow



Downy Woodpecker

The **Downy Woodpecker** is a familiar year-round visitor to backyards across North America. This species is our smallest woodpecker which actually gives it an advantage in both gathering food and its possibilities of habitats.

House Finches now thrive in our yards, parks and urban centres. They nest in all types of trees, and even in building vents and hanging planters. You'll see or hear them calling year-round from tall trees and hydro-lines.



House Finch - Photographed by Phil Myers



House Sparrow

This week's species is the **House Sparrow**. Anyone with a backyard bird feeder knows the House Sparrow. This species was introduced to North America and now is the most widely distributed wild bird on Earth!

The **Northern Cardinal**, also known in French as Cardinal rouge, is a welcome visitor at any backyard feeder. Both male and female sing up to 20 different songs! Some Cardinal pairs mate for life and they may raise up to 3 broods per summer.



Northern Cardinal



Purple Finch - Photographed by John Whitaker.

The name “**Purple Finch**” is somewhat misleading as the males are actually a pink/ red colour. This species is a noisy bird that sometimes will actually add in the sounds of other species such as Barn Swallows, American Goldfinches and Eastern Towhees into their rich warbling song.

This tiny bird is actually a long-distance migrant that spends its winters in Central America. The **Ruby-throated hummingbird** can beat its wings more than 50 times a second!



Ruby-Throated Hummingbird



Song Sparrow - Photographed by Matt Muir

The **Song Sparrow**, known in French as Bruant chanteur, is one of the most actively singing songbirds during the nesting season. There are over 24 different subspecies of Song Sparrows recognized, with many in our Ottawa region as well.

The **White-breasted Nuthatch**, also known in French as Sittelle à poitrine blanche, is one of a small number of bird species in Canada that can hang upside-down or sideways while feeding and can also move down tree trunks head-first.



White-Breasted Nuthatch - Photographed by Greg Miller

Thank You!



It's wonderful that you care about nature and are keen to learn about the many bird species nearby you.

Our NatureHood program inspires Canadians like you to seek out and learn about nearby nature. Likely you've already discovered that spending time in nature is good for your heart, mind and soul.

Perhaps you would like to use one of our handy [NatureHood Tour](#) brochures to visit green spaces close by and discover more backyard birds and other critters. And we hope you might add your bird or wildlife sightings to our [NatureHood app](#) which helps us monitor wildlife populations.

About Nature Canada:

For over 75 years, Nature Canada has been your voice for nature. Together we defend wildlife and protect wilderness in your province and across the country – places so you can spot wildlife and experience the joys of nature. And we inspire more Canadians to connect and value nature in our lives.



Chipping Sparrow

With the support of caring people like you, we've helped preserve 63 million acres of parks and wildlife areas and protect countless, cherished species that depend on this habitat -- from butterflies to birds to bears.

You can help protect animals, plants and many special areas that all make up our beautiful country with a donation to Nature Canada today.

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