

For Our Birds

– with files from the Canadian Wildlife Federation and Bird Studies Canada.

With the warmth of the sun, they return every year; their graceful wings skirting the breeze, their small but steady sounds banishing the winter. We delight in their first, tentative calls; we marvel at the mystery that lets them fly – the little miracle we never tire of.

The ability to fly is undoubtedly what has helped birds survive over 150 million years.

Feathers keep them warm, and their warm-bloodedness lets them stay aloft no matter what the temperature. Their hollow, reinforced bones, beaks, and simple excretory systems are all Nature's attempts to keep them as light as possible. Their comparatively enormous chest muscles give them the power they need to fly, and indeed, to keep us amazed.

National Wildlife Week 2004

The most watched and beloved of Canada's wildlife species are the birds we see in our backyards. So this year for National Wildlife Week (NWW) we are celebrating those cheerful visitors. Backyard birds play a vital role in the health of our ecosystem. They consume insects, disperse seeds, and pollinate flowers. Our feathered friends face many dangers in their short lives: predators, hunters, alien species, climate change, disease, and toxic chemicals all take their toll. But the biggest threat of all is disruption and loss of habitats, which provide life support systems for all wildlife. Without habitat there can be no wildlife.

National Wildlife Week takes place each year in the week surrounding April 10th, the birthday of Jack Miner, a pioneer of Canada's conservation movement. Proclaimed in 1947 by an act of Parliament, NWW is a time to celebrate our natural heritage and play a part in its conservation. NWW is a program of the Canadian Wildlife Federation, a non-profit, non-governmental organization, sponsored in partnership with provincial and territorial government wildlife agencies and the Canadian Wildlife Service.



Blue Jay

Celebrate National Wildlife Week!

In celebration of National Wildlife Week, activities, events and festivals will be taking place across the country, celebrating backyard birds from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia. Here are some ideas for you and your group:

- F Organize a talent, song, poster, or story-writing contest with a bird theme.
- F Adopt a field or park and make it bird friendly.
- F Write feature articles about backyard birds and related issues in

your community; submit them to a local newspaper or radio station.

- F Invite environmental educators to give talks on related topics.
- F Publicize your project. By promoting your efforts through such media as newspapers, bulletins, newsletters, and flyers, you'll be able to raise awareness about declining bird populations and encourage others to help.
- F Create a "Birds in our Backyard" display at your local library or school, using photos, examples of habitat, and migration routes to demonstrate the problems the birds face in your community.

What can you do to help backyard birds?

Here are a few ways you can help the birds in your backyard:

- F Put up a birdhouse. As habitat disappears, birds have fewer places to nest each spring.
- F Put a bird-bath in your yard to provide a drinking and bathing source for birds.
- F Place bird feeders and nectar feeders at proper distances from



Downy Woodpecker



Canada Goose



Black-capped Chickadee

Photo: Scouts Canada Archives

windows or in places where birds cannot be ambushed by predators. Use appropriate seed and other foods.

- F Limit the use of lawn chemicals and pesticides in your garden, which are harmful not only to birds, but to a variety of wildlife and household pets.
- F Stay on the trails in natural areas and respect restricted sections.
- F Learn to identify the common birds of your neighborhood, and teach youth in your group the value of birds and other wildlife.
- F Get involved in local and backyard bird monitoring projects.

– from the *Canadian Wildlife Federation* <http://www.cwf-fcf.org/>

Watch the Birdie!

Project Nest Watch is aimed at following the health of bird populations through long-term monitoring of nesting activity across Canada. Data gathered from this project will provide valuable information on the state of the wider environment.

To participate in Project Nest Watch, you need to find a bird's nest, follow it through the nesting season and report your observations. (We have chosen the **American Robin** as a special focus, since it occurs right across Canada, the nests and the birds are fairly easy to find and identify so that even beginning birders can participate, and robins are somewhat tolerant of people observing their nests.) Robins nest in city backyards as well as in the wider countryside so no matter where you live (south of the tree line), you can try to find a nest and join the project!

This project is web-based. There is no fee to participate in Project Nest Watch and everyone can contribute data from as many nests as they like. To do so, you will first have to create an online profile; from there, data can be entered and modified as needed.

To join, please see the Project Nest Watch pages at Bird Studies Canada: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/national/nestwatch.html>.



Watch the birdie safely – Code of Conduct for birders

The privilege of observing a nest and its occupants is a wonderful feeling and it is essential that our intrusion into the birds' lives does not jeopardize their nesting success.

- F Don't step on the nests, and take good care not to dislodge any nests when moving around dense foliage. Make sure no cats, crows or jays are following you as they are predators of eggs and young birds.
- F When you know where a nest is located (you have marked it previously with a piece of material a few metres away), it is good practice to approach it casually, as if by chance, rather than directly and deliberately. Birds are then likely to regard you as harmless and not as a predator intent on robbing the nest contents. When possible, a sitting bird should not be given a sudden fright as it may accidentally knock some of the eggs or young out of the nest if it flies off or, worse, choose to desert its nest.
- F In general, it is best not to flush birds in failing evening light. Likewise, birds should not be disturbed in adverse weather such as cold, heavy rain, or extreme heat.
- F Minimize disturbance at nests. Keep each visit brief. Any equipment likely to be wanted at the

nest (e.g., notebook, field sheet, camera) should be ready before you approach. Cameras can be used but please restrain photo sessions to a reasonable time.

- F Damaged or trampled vegetation can expose a well-sheltered nest to rain, wind or predators. Avoid breaking branches or removing vegetation.
- F Do not handle the young or eggs. Small eggs and young are very delicate, and can be easily cracked, chilled or injured. Small nestlings are remarkably helpless and may not be able to crawl back into the nest cup if displaced, even in a nest box. Your touch will leave a scent. If you are unable to see all of the nest (to count eggs) because some chicks obscure the view, then indicate it is a minimum number in the visit comment box rather than handle the nest contents. This is not just a question of ethics. It is illegal to disturb the nests of migratory birds or be in possession of birds or eggs.
- F If you wish to search private land as part of your nest recording, gain permission first from the landowner. Remember that you are asking a favour, and explain your purpose. Many landowners will probably be interested and keen to know about what you are doing. It is very important to treat the owners and their property with the utmost respect and to follow any special requests they make.

Enhance your springtime experience by joining these and other worthwhile projects, and be sure to include some bird activities in your program. Our birds add so much to our lives: let's help them as much as we can. The yearly miracle depends on it. X

– Lots more bird information can be found in the Field Book for Canadian Scouting available at your local Scout Shop or online at www.scouts.ca. Very cheep!

