

Winter FINCHES

Southern Alberta hosts various winter finches like Pine siskins, Common and Hoary redpolls, Pine grosbeaks, Crossbills and Evening grosbeaks, especially during “irruption” years when boreal food (spruce/conifer seeds) are scarce, leading them south to feeders and areas like Weaselhead. You will also find resident finches like House finches, but true winter finches are tied to northern seed crops. Although you may not see all of the winter finches in your backyard, the upcoming winter promises that these lovely little birds will be here in search of winter crops.



The White-winged crossbill's pendulum has swung west for the winter of 2025-26. An excellent spruce crop from northeastern Manitoba to Alaska and down the mountains of western Canada should contain the majority of White-winged crossbills this winter.



Areas affected by Spruce Budworm infestations provided widespread and bountiful food during the breeding season, but these same areas also have a very poor cone crop for the winter. Siskins that bred in these areas will be on the move. As seen by band recoveries, Pine Siskins, similar to White-winged Crossbills, will move east or west in search of cone crops. This year, birds will move towards both extensive cone crop areas.



Like the other budworm-loving finches, Evening grosbeaks were widespread in these areas, rearing families on this abundant food source. Food sources used post-budworm, like cherry species, ash, and mountain ash, had poor crops over widespread areas.



Many of the redpolls coming out of the central-western subarctic/arctic regions should gravitate toward the Manitoba westward cone crop.



There should be a small to moderate flight of Pine Grosbeaks this winter in Southern Alberta. The crop of Mountain ash appears below average to poor in the east and the crop appears to be above average in the Western provinces.



Once limited to the Western United States and Mexico, House finches are now found from coast to coast, and as far north as Southern Canada. In 1939 a few of the birds, originally captured in Santa Barbara, California, were set free on New York's Long Island by a pet store owner. By the early 1940s wild nests were beginning to show up on Long Island, and from there the spread continued. They spend the year round in Calgary and compete with native species, especially at our backyard feeders, and can be very aggressive.



JIM ST. LAURENT



Jim's years of guiding bird walks for the Wild Bird Store has been instrumental in teaching "birders" how to get the most out of their birding excursions.

Unfortunately, Jim has decided he can no longer continue to spend many hours walking while guiding his walks. An option for Jim is to continue his lifelong passion, not only for birding, but for sharing his knowledge and passion in a different way. Birding by car has become an alternative but might surprise you with the multitude of species you have the opportunity, especially when your guide is so proficient at finding wild birds.

POLICEMAN'S FLATS, BLACKIE & FRANK LAKE AREA Saturday

January 10, 2026

Ticket price \$7.00 (includes GST +fees)



WATER VALLEY, GRAND VALLEY ROAD AREA Saturday January 24, 2026

Ticket price \$7.00 (includes GST +fees)

NORTHEAST IRRICANA AREA Saturday February 7, 2026

Ticket price \$7.00 (includes GST +fees)

PRIDDIS TO LONGVIEW AREA Saturday February 21, 2026

PLEASE NOTE: All trips are by car. Bring lunch. Will usually be 5-6 hours. We will be searching for winter visitors such as Snowy owls, Snow buntings, Red-tail hawks, Gyrfalcons, Redpolls and others. As well as foothill birds like Great gray owls, crossbills & others.

All trips start by meeting at 9:00am at the rear parking of the Wild Bird Store. Carpooling is encouraged.



ON LOCATION

Wildwood Community Centre (4411 Spruce Drive SW)

1st Tuesday of each month 3:00pm to 5:30pm

Seed Truck will be at this location Tuesday, January 6, 2026

Crowfoot Arena (corner of John Laurie & Nosehill Drive NW)

Every Wednesday 2:00pm to 5:30pm

The Mobile Seed Truck is a mini version of The Wild Bird Store, and as such, we are limited to what we can carry. It is therefore, highly recommended that you place an order the day before the truck is to be at your desired location. This will ensure that when you come to the Mobile Seed Truck you get the items you need. You can place orders by emailing orders@wildbirdstore.ca or texting to

(403) 701-4571

OPTIONS FOR SHOPPING AT THE WILD BIRD STORE

In Store or on the Seed Truck



Shop in Store



Curbside Pick up

Phone your order in and pay for it at least 30 minutes prior to arriving at The Wild Bird Store for pick up. Park in the curbside parking stall, call the store (403) 640-2632, pop your trunk or hatch and leave the rest to us.



Home Delivery

Please phone the store at (403)640-2632 any day prior to 12:00noon on the Wednesday before your delivery with your order, place and pay for your delivery.

Please phone with your order as early as possible to avoid disappointment.

If you have any specials instructions, please do not forget to inform us when you place your order.

A minimum of \$25.00 (before GST) is required on ALL delivery orders

PLEASE NOTE

**There will be NO
DELIVERIES on
Thursday January 1,**



QUESTION: I recently read a Facebook report by an Alberta bird-lover who had the pleasure of seeing not one, not a pair, but as many as 11 Common loons on the aptly named Loon Lake. Out of curiosity, how long do these birds live and do they mate for life?

RESPONSE: You know, when it comes to longevity in the world of wild birds, one generally thinks of Albatrosses as holding the record for the oldest living birds in the world. Wisdom, a Laysan albatross and the world's oldest known wild bird at 75, immediately comes to mind. She was still incubating eggs in 2024 but lost her mate and has not bred since. But those birds also live and breed in remote regions

of the world far from the influences of humans. Don't get me wrong—they certainly have their fair share of threats to their lives from us; long-line fisheries being one of the most significant. But more to your question about Common loons.

We really have to be impressed with an amazing pair still nesting today in the Seney National Wildlife Refuge in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. This year the male marked his 38th birthday! His female partner, named Fe partly after the Spanish word for "Faith", was banded as an adult and thus, is at 39. We know this because both birds sport aluminum numbered leg bands. The male, who is known as ABJ (it means Adult Banded Juvenile), was one of three chicks banded in 1987 in that same refuge and has returned there to breed every year since. Together this pair has raised 29 young. What makes this so newsworthy is that for Common loons to live this long and breed so successfully, they must overcome many dangers—toxic mercury from natural and human-caused sources, lead poisoning from lost fishing gear, lake acidification, reduced fish populations, and disturbance during the breeding season from humans competing for use of the habitat. In the fall, they face even more threats including severe weather systems caused by climate warming during their 3,000-mile migration to winter off the coast of Florida and then their return back home. Both birds managed to survive a botulism outbreak in the Refuge in 2006 and 2012, which claimed the lives of a goodly number of loons in those years. As for mating for life, very few bird species do this. Even after raising more than 40 chicks together as a pair over a 25-year span, the pair separated and ended up with new mates to continue breeding.



Oldest pair of Common loons

Fe and ABJ

DAVID M. BIRD, Ph.D
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McGill University

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www.askprofessorbird.com

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ABOUT DR. DAVID



David M. Bird is Emeritus Professor of Wildlife Biology and the former Director of the Avian Science and Conservation Centre at McGill University. As a past-president of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists, a former board member with Birds Canada, a Fellow of both the American Ornithological Society and the International Ornithological Union, he has received several awards for his conservation and public education efforts. Dr. Bird is a regular columnist on birds for *Bird Watcher's Digest* and *Canadian Wildlife* magazines and is the author of several books and over 200 peer-reviewed scientific publications. He is the consultant editor for multiple editions of DK Canada's *Birds of Canada*, *Birds of Eastern Canada*, *Birds of Western Canada*, and *Pocket Birds of Canada*. To know more about him, visit www.askprofessorbird.com or email david.bird@mcgill.ca.

We offer a discount if you return your seed bags (sorry—not the Mother Nature bags which we cannot re-use), suet ball containers, if you bring your own container to fill or use a bag from our re-cycle bin. This discount is in addition to any other discount offered.



Write a Google review on your experience at The Wild Bird Store, and as a thank-you, we will give you 100 customer loyalty points (\$5.00 value). To get a promo code, kindly email info@wildbirdstore.ca
(Please one Google review per customer)



Earn 200 customer loyalty points (\$10.00 value) by referring a friend, acquaintance or fellow birder.
Please visit the store to get a promo code



No need for a card just give your phone number. You earn \$1.00 for every \$20.00 spent (sorry, excludes “sales” items, books, optics and consignment items) and can be used in-store and on Mobile Seed Truck. As a loyalty member, our monthly promotional and in-store “specials” are automatically given at the cash register.



Combining our Seniors 10% discount with the loyalty program (sorry—excludes “sales” items, books, optics and consignment items.)



Discount for membership 10% discount for members of Fish Creek Park, AIWC, Priddis Golf Club, Nature Calgary, Sandy Cross Conservation, Springbank Garden Club and Calgary Horticultural Society. Must present valid membership card at time of purchase.



Discount for Military Members & Veterans 10% discount on purchases in-store or on Mobile Seed Truck (sorry—excludes “sales” items, books, optics and consignment items)



Why winter water is essential:

winter than in summer because natural sources freeze, forcing them to expend vital energy melting snow or ice, making provided open, unfrozen water sources (like heated birdbath) a critical survival aid for drinking and staying clean and warm.

Dehydration Risk: Many natural water sources freeze over, leaving birds with nowhere to drink, leading to dehydration and potentially death. This especially applies to the small songbirds.

Energy Conservation: Melting snow or ice to get water costs birds significant body heat and calories, which are already scarce in winter.

Feather Maintenance: Bathing in unfrozen water keeps feathers clean, aligned, and waterproof, which is vital for trapping body heat and proper insulation against the cold.

Water is crucial for wild birds in winter for hydration, preening (feather maintenance for insulation), and for cooling in summer, but even more so in



Hydration: Birds need to drink at least twice a day to stay hydrated, and this need doesn't stop in winter.

How to provide winter water:

- **Use Heated Baths:** Thermostatically controlled heated birdbaths or adding a heater to existing baths keeps water liquid and accessible
- **Provide Perches:** Add stones or sticks to a shallow water source so birds have a safe place to land and drink
- **Placement:** Position baths near shrubs or trees for predation cover, but away from feeders to prevent conflict
- **Clean Regularly:** Even in winter, baths need cleaning to prevent bacteria and disease spread
- **During Severe Winter weather:** When the temperature drops, prevent the birds from bathing fully in the birdbath, by placing a flat rock in the center of the bowl. No one wants to see birds with frozen feathers!



Reflective paint on reindeer antlers reduces accidents



Finnish reindeer herders tested painting antlers with reflective paint to reduce vehicle collisions, making them visible to drivers at night; it showed promise by increasing visibility but faced issues like paint durability and animal behavior, leading to other solutions like reflective collars and a reindeer alert app (Porokello).



Porokello app: (Finnish for “Reindeer Bell”) is a mobile app for IOS and Android primarily used in Finland, that helps drivers avoid collisions with reindeer by using crowdsourced data; users, especially professional drivers, report reindeer sightings, triggering real-time alerts (sound/colour) for other users in the area, significantly cutting accidents in Lapland. It uses location services to map warnings that last about 30 minutes, creating a communal safety network for areas with high reindeer populations.



DONATIONS

Located at The Wild Bird Store (near the seed bins). We collect your cash as well as “wishlist” donations and arrange for delivery of the donations to these organizations that we support.

For the months of December 2025, January and February 2026 will be Ellis Nature Centre in Lacombe.



Thank you for your support

ellisnaturecentre.ca

THE GRUE JAY



Blue jay father

"Grue" jay

Green jay

A hybrid of a Blue jay and a Green jay, nicknamed "Grue jay", was recently discovered in Texas, marking the first known natural occurrence of this cross, resulting from range shifts likely due to climate change bringing the species into contact. This unique bird shows a mix of features from both parents, such as blue back feathers with white wing spots (like a Blue jay), but a black mask and eye spot (like a Green jay) and Green jay vocalizations, challenging previous beliefs about their separation and high-lighting climate change's impact on species interactions.

In the 1950s, the ranges of Green jays, a tropical bird found across Central America, extended just barely up from Mexico into south Texas and the range of Blue jays, a temperate bird living all across the Eastern U.S. and Canada, extended about as far west as Houston. They almost never came into contact with each other. But since then, as Green jays have pushed north and Blue jays pushed west, their ranges have converged around San Antonio.



Blue jay

Steller's jay



Stellhouse jay

Steller's jays and Blue jays can interbreed where their ranges overlap, especially in the Rockies, creating hybrids often called Stellhouse jays, displaying mixed traits like darker crests with blue bodies, and sometimes documented in places like Colorado. These natural crosses happen because they're in the same genus, with climate change sometimes pushing ranges together, leading to these unique, crested jay hybrids



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web: wildbirdstore.ca
email:
info@wildbirdstore.ca

Monday through Saturday 10:00am to 5:00pm

CLOSED Sundays and ALL Statutory holidays for Faith, Family & Friends



The Wild Bird Store will be as follows to celebrate the New Year 2026:

New Years Eve, Wednesday, December 31, 2025: 10 AM – 3 PM

New Years Day Thursday January 1, 2026 CLOSED

Follow us on:

Facebook@thewildbirdstoreyyyc

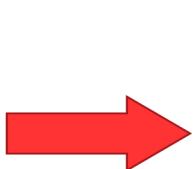
Twitter@wildbirdstoreyyyc

Go to YouTube, type in the search bar “The Wild Bird Store” to watch our videos and to help us become more visible.

Be sure to click on “subscribe” before you leave the page.

Fun Facts about the Common Loon!

- They have solid bones, reducing buoyancy and helping them dive deep for fish
- They can blow air out of their lungs and flatten feathers to become more hydrodynamic, diving as deep as 160 feet
- Sharp, rear-pointing barbs on their tongue and mouth help them hold onto slippery fish



Sorry! Excludes optics, books,
cards & consignment items

HAPPY BIRDING!