

CHRISTMAS

bird count

COMMON BIRD SPECIES GUIDE

FOR LEDUC



Sponsors

PARTNERING with *nature* 



CITY OF
Leduc

Leduc.ca

Message from the Mayor



Leduc residents have joined together with the City of Leduc, the Leduc Environmental Advisory Board (LEAB) and other stakeholders to help make our community a great place to live, work and play.

Our enviable natural spaces play an important role in creating a community we are proud to call home.

Consider the natural amenities we enjoy through all four seasons. Telford Lake's beautiful extended boardwalk with its scenic viewpoints gives families a ready-made way to participate in events such as the spring and Christmas bird counts. Leduc's trail system offers walkers, bikers – everyone from families to seniors – an ever-changing view depending on the season.

New initiatives such as the pollinator garden offer fresh ways to enjoy our city while learning more about outdoor life and how we can all partner with nature so we can continue to enjoy our great outdoors for many years to come.

This handy, informative guide will make a useful companion as you enjoy our open spaces, parks and trails – and become better acquainted with the many species of birds that also call Leduc home.

We encourage you to visit Leduc.ca to learn more about participating in the Leduc spring and Christmas bird counts. The data gathered from these bird counts assists with identifying local bird trends and compiling national bird count data.

The City of Leduc would like to thank the Leduc Environmental Advisory Board (LEAB) and the Leduc Wildlife Conservation Society (LWCS) for their support and involvement with the bird count activities and for their collaboration with creating these local guides.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Bob Young
Mayor



Black-billed Magpie

Black-billed magpies are familiar and entertaining birds of western North America. They are black and white overall with blue-green iridescent flashes in the wing and tail. They are slightly larger than blue jays with much longer, diamond-shaped tails and heavier bills. A vocal bird, magpies sit on fence posts and road signs or flap across rangelands with their white wing patches flashing and their very long tails trailing behind them.

Black-capped Chickadee



This bird is almost universally considered “cute” thanks to its oversized round head, tiny body and curiosity about everything, including humans. The chickadee’s black cap and bib, white cheeks, grey back, wings, tail and whitish underside with buffy sides are distinctive. Its habit of investigating people and everything else in its home territory, and quickness to discover bird feeders, make it one of the first birds most people learn. They are often seen at backyard bird feeders.





Blue Jay

This common, large songbird is familiar to many people with its perky crest, blue, white and black plumage and noisy calls. Blue jays are known for their intelligence and complex social systems with tight family bonds. Their fondness for acorns is credited with helping spread oak trees after the last glacial period. In the winter months a regular supply of peanuts, mixed grains and sunflower seeds will attract blue jays to your backyard feeders.

Bohemian Waxwing

The bohemian waxwing is an irregular winter visitor from the far North. They are a medium-sized songbird, brownish grey overall. Bohemian waxwings feature a beautiful black mask and have white and yellow feathers edging on their wings. Their tail is yellow tipped and they have a reddish colour under the tail. They are often sighted in large groups on mountain ash trees.





Common Raven

Ravens are known to be among the most intelligent birds, along with others in the Corvid species such as crows, blue jays and magpies. They are very large with a thick neck, shaggy throat feathers and a bowie knife of a beak. They are more slender than crows with longer, narrower wings and longer, thinner “fingers” at the wingtips. These big, sooty birds thrive among humans and in the back of beyond, stretching across the sky on easy, flowing wingbeats and filling the empty spaces with an echoing croak. Ravens are often sighted year round, not just in the winter months.

Common Redpoll

As energetic as their electric zapping call notes would suggest, common redpolls are small songbirds with small heads and small, pointed, seed-eating bills. Their tail is short with a small notch at the tip. They are active foragers that travel in busy flocks. Look for them feeding on catkins in birch trees or congregating at bird feeders, allowing delightfully close looks.



Photo credit: Douglas Hube



COMMON BIRD SPECIES SIGHTED IN LEDUC

Downy Woodpecker

The active little downy woodpecker is a familiar sight at backyard feeders and in parks and woodlots where it joins flocks of chickadees and nuthatches, barely outsizing them. An often acrobatic forager, this black and white woodpecker is at home on tiny branches or balancing on slender plant galls, sycamore seed balls and suet feeders. Males have a small red patch on the back of the head. They can be mistaken for hairy woodpeckers; however, they are smaller in size and have a shorter bill. Downy woodpeckers are the most common woodpecker species to visit a backyard bird feeder.



Grey Partridge

Introduced from Eurasia, the grey partridge can be found in flat agricultural land along the length of the Canada-United States border. They are a small, chicken-like bird with a short neck and tail. They feature a greyish brown back and chest with a dark reddish u-shaped belly patch. Their face and throat are also a reddish colour and they have a chestnut-coloured tail.



Great Horned Owl

With its long, earlike tufts, intimidating yellow-eyed stare and deep, hooting voice, the great horned owl is the quintessential owl of storybooks. This powerful predator is one of the most common owls in North America. They are large, thick-bodied owls that are mottled grey-brown with reddish brown faces and a neat white patch on their throats. Their wings are broad and rounded.

Hairy Woodpecker

The hairy woodpecker is a small but powerful bird that forages along trunks and main branches of large trees. It is larger and wields a much longer bill than the downy woodpecker's almost thorn-like bill. Hairy woodpeckers have a somewhat soldierly look with their erect, straight-backed posture on tree trunks and their cleanly striped heads. Males have a red patch on the back of the head. Look for them at backyard suet or sunflower feeders and listen for them whinnying from woodlots, parks and forests. Woodpeckers don't sing songs, but drum loudly against pieces of wood or metal to achieve the same effect.



COMMON BIRD SPECIES SIGHTED IN LEDUC

House Finch

House finches are small-bodied finches with fairly large beaks and somewhat long, flat heads. The wings are short, making the tail seem long by comparison. Adult males are rosy red around the face and upper breast with a streaky brown back, belly and tail. Adult females are not red; they are plain greyish-brown with thick, blurry streaks. The bird's long, twittering song can be heard in most neighbourhoods where they are found at bird feeders.



Male

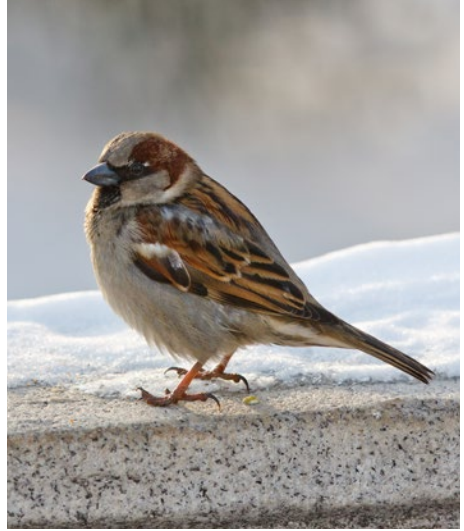


Female



House Sparrow

House sparrows, originally introduced to North America in the 1850s, are one of the most commonly sighted bird species. House sparrows are chunkier and fuller in the chest with a larger, rounded head, shorter tail and stouter bill than most American sparrows. Male house sparrows are brightly coloured birds with grey heads, white cheeks, a black bib and rufous neck. Females are a plain buffy brown overall with dingy grey-brown underparts. Their backs are noticeably striped with buff, black and brown. House sparrows are most often sighted at backyard bird feeders.



Northern Flicker

Northern flickers are large, brown woodpeckers with a gentle expression and handsome black-scalloped plumage. Flickers are often found in open habitats near trees, including woodlands, edges, yards and parks. Flickers eat mainly ants and beetles, digging for them with their unusual, slightly curved bill. To find northern flickers, try walking through open woods or forest edges, but scan the ground. They fly in an up-and-down path using heavy flaps interspersed with glides. Look for the obvious white rump patch in flight. Also, be sure to listen for their loud, ringing call and their piercing yelp.



Pine Grosbeak

The pine grosbeak is a large, plump, heavy-chested finch with a round head. Its bill is thick and conical but much stubbier than in other finch species. The tail is long and slightly notched. Males are reddish pink and grey. Females and immatures are greyish with tints of reddish orange or yellow on the head and rump. They all have dark grey wings marked by two white wingbars. They easily crush seeds and nip off tree buds and needles with their thick and stubby bill. In the winter they form small groups and travel together in search of seeds and fruits. They often show up at bird feeders.



Male



Female





Pine Siskin

Although pine siskins prefer evergreen or mixed evergreen and deciduous forests with open canopies, they are opportunistic and adaptable in their search for seeds. They'll forage in weedy fields, scrubby thickets and flock around backyard feeders, especially thistle feeders, in woodlands and suburbs. Flocks of tiny pine siskins may monopolize your thistle feeder one winter and be absent the next. Better suited to clinging to branch tips than to hopping along the ground, these brown-streaked acrobats flash yellow wing markings as they flutter while feeding or as they explode into flight. Flocks are gregarious, and you may hear their insistent wheezy twitters before you see them.

Red-breasted Nuthatch

An intense bundle of energy at your feeder, red-breasted nuthatches are tiny, active birds. They are blue-grey birds with strongly patterned heads: a black cap and stripe through the eye broken up by a white stripe over the eye. The underparts are rich rusty cinnamon, paler in females. They move quickly over trunks and branches probing for food in crevices and under flakes of bark. Their flight is short and bouncy. Their excitable yank-yank calls sound like tiny tin horns being honked in the treetops.



COMMON BIRD SPECIES SIGHTED IN LEDUC



Snow Bunting

Appropriately named, the snow bunting is a bird of the high Arctic and snowy winter fields. Even on a warm day, the mostly white plumage of a bunting flock evokes the image of a snowstorm. They are a small songbird with brownish colouring on their back and face and a white underside. They feature a black tail with white outer feathers. In the winter they are found in open weedy and grassy fields and along shores of lakes. They walk along barren places with a hunched-over posture, easily blending in with the ground.

White-breasted Nuthatch

This common feeder bird has grey-blue on the back and a frosty white face and underparts. The lower belly and under the tail are often chestnut. They appear to have almost no neck, the tail is very short and the long, narrow bill is straight or slightly upturned. White-breasted nuthatches are active, agile little birds with an appetite for insects and large, meaty seeds. They get their common name from their habit of jamming large nuts and acorns into tree bark, then whacking them with their sharp bill to “hatch” out the seed from the inside. Although small, their voices are loud and often their insistent nasal yammering will lead you right to them.





Dark Skies mean a good sleep for our feathered friends!

Just as the dark helps us get a good night's sleep, birds and other animals also need Dark Skies to find protection from predators, rest properly and renew their energy. Nocturnal and some migratory birds travel and thrive in darkness. Too much light can confuse, disorientate and exhaust them.

All nature needs rejuvenation, and darkness offers every living creature a healthy, natural environment.

The City of Leduc and LEAB support the value of light efficiency and Dark Skies. LEAB is promoting the benefit of Dark Skies on behalf of the many birds in our area.



What can you do to help make our light use more efficient?

- **Turn off all lights** – especially exterior lights – not needed for security and safety.
- For needed outdoor lights, shield the fixture to prevent light shining upward and into neighbouring properties, especially into natural areas.

When the lights are off, not only can you save money on your utility bill, you can enjoy nature as you've rarely seen it. Marvel at the stars, the silhouettes and the quiet of nature at rest.

Tips for observing birds

- Observe birds from a safe distance. Do not disturb nesting sites or birds with their young.
- Avoid wearing bright clothing or clothing that rustles. Try not to shout or be too loud, as you could disturb or startle the birds.
- Binoculars are extremely helpful to observe birds at a distance. Bird watchers consider this an essential item in their bird watching toolkit.
- Installing a bird feeder is an excellent way to attract birds to your yard. See the backyard feeder tips for suggestions.
- Try to go bird watching in the early morning when birds are most active and tend to call more often.
- Avoid bird watching on windy days and hot days when birds are less active. If you must bird watch on a hot day, do it in the early morning or late in the afternoon when it is cooler and the birds are likely to be more active.



House sparrows

Backyard feeder tips

If you use a mix, it is best to look for quality mixes that include sunflower seeds, peanuts, white millet and cracked corn, which provide birds with energy and protein. Please do not feed bread to birds, including waterfowl.

Black-oil sunflower seed: attracts a large variety of birds including chickadees, nuthatches, finches, sparrows and woodpeckers. You may wish to use sunflower chips (shelled seed), which are more expensive but do not sprout when they fall to the ground. Chickadees and nuthatches prefer them with shells.

Striped sunflower seed: attracts blue jays, chickadees and woodpeckers.

- Listen closely for birds calling. This can help lead you to their location and assist with identifying the bird.
- Observe the bird's size, shape, colour, patterns and any other identifying features such as the bill shape. It can be helpful to use a common bird you are familiar with as a reference for bird size. Your written observations can later assist you with identifying the bird.
- Birds are often sighted in parks, around bodies of water, in backyards around feeders and along boulevards. There is a high probability of sighting birds in Leduc around Telford Lake, Fred Johns Park and Deer Valley Park. The multiway along Telford Lake features excellent bird watching lookout points.
- Use this guide as a basic resource in identifying common birds of Leduc. For more detailed information, download free apps to your smartphone or smart device. Alternatively, websites such as www.audubon.org or www.allaboutbirds.org are helpful and feature bird call sound clips.

Nyger (thistle) seed: attracts common redpolls, house finches, pine siskins and American goldfinches. A nyger feeder or nyger sock is recommended. Nyger seed will not sprout on the ground but it can go rancid in wet weather so it is best to put out small quantities to try to keep it dry.

Suet: attracts woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, blue jays and starlings. You can use a variety of feeders, including a suet cage, or tie to a branch or tree trunk. It is recommended to avoid putting suet out in the summer as it can go rancid in hot temperatures.

Unsalted peanuts (or other nuts): attracts blue jays, woodpeckers, flickers, nuthatches, chickadees and magpies. Large birds like blue jays prefer peanuts with shells, whereas small birds like chickadees and nuthatches prefer shelled. You may wish to purchase a squirrel-proof feeder.

Fruit: attracts Baltimore orioles, robins and cedar waxwings. Oranges (cut in half), grapes, raisins and dried pumpkin or apple seeds are popular options.



Black-capped chickadee

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Christmas Bird Count happens annually around the third week in December.

Celebrate a new festive tradition and enjoy this fun, free family activity.

Watch for specific dates and details at Leduc.ca.

Useful resources

Cornell Lab for Ornithology
aboutbirds.org

National Audubon Society
audubon.org

Alberta Institute for
Wildlife Conservation
aiwc.ca

Leduc Wildlife
Conservation Society
leducwildlifeconservationsocie.canic.ws

City of Leduc
Leduc.ca

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Eco-smart Hotline: 780-980-7107

E-mail: ecosmart@Leduc.ca

Sponsors



Partnering organizations

