



Who's who at Kansas birdfeeders
Guide to a Winter Windowsill

Cardinal

◀ The cardinal is a prized visitor at any birdfeeder, combining beautiful plumage with an appealing song. The male cardinal's red pigmentation actually intensifies as the winter goes on and the gray tips of his body feathers wear off, leaving only the brighter red below. Before the turn of the century, cardinals were considered to be southern birds. Bent's 1886 check list established their common northern range limit at the Ohio River, but they are now found well into eastern Canada, the upper Mississippi River valley, and the northern Plains even in winter. This range extension could be due in part to the increasing popularity of bird feeding which may be changing the wintering habits of a number of bird species. Photo by Jean & Ed Schulenberg.

Blue Jay

The blue jay, like its relatives, the crow and magpie, is magnificently adaptable. Through the year, a jay is likely to eat anything from mice (which he will hunt and catch himself) to acorns. The bulk of the blue jay's diet is vegetable, however, and includes corn, sunflower seeds, some small grains, and a variety of wild seeds and insects. Known for its raucous call, the jay also sings more pleasing songs, including a slightly wistful two-note "tea cup" air that is totally out of character for a neighborhood tough with a reputation as a nest robber. Photo by Bob Gress.





White-breasted Nuthatch

The white-breasted nuthatch doesn't bother to head south at the threat of winter. This nuthatch is resident through most of its range, although it seems to be more conspicuous during the winter after leaf fall when most breeding birds have evacuated, leaving the nuthatches, chickadees, and woodpeckers to animate the woods. Nuthatches take advantage of most of the nuts and fruits that persist through the winter in a woodlot, and they take insect larvae and eggs from bark crevices as well. Proprietors of bird feeders report that nuthatches are especially fond of sunflower seeds, suet, peanut butter, and whole peanuts. Photo by Barbara Pratt.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

The red-breasted nuthatch is a smaller version of the white-breasted with the same high white cheeks, broken in the red-breasted with a prominent black line through the eye. Unlike the white-breasted nuthatch, the red-breasted does migrate out of some of its nesting range in the coniferous timber of Canada and the Rockies, in most winters appearing at feeders from southern Canada to as far south as the Gulf coast. These small nuthatches seem even fonder of suet than their larger relatives. Photo by Lloyd Brockus.

Black-capped Chickadee

Chickadees are almost always in an awful hurry which may be a reflection of irrepressible *joie de vivre* as many dedicated bird watchers would have you believe or just the demands of an insatiable appetite. The acrobatic skill that has endeared the chickadee to so many bird watchers is a necessity for a bird that spends so much of its time feeding along tree branches and trunks. Even in the middle of the winter, a substantial part of the chickadee's diet consists of insects—adults, larvae, and eggs—gleaned from tree bark. On the feeder, chickadees focus on sunflower seeds, peanuts, and suet. Photo by Barbara Pratt.





Tree Sparrow

The tree sparrow summers in central Canada in scrubby timber just south of tree line, coming south only when the northern winter shows its teeth. In most years, this hardy species will not be found much south of Oklahoma and northern Texas. At least one study has found that tree sparrows prefer the smaller seeds commonly offered at feeding stations, especially white milo and millet. Like most other sparrows, they like their seed on the ground. Away from the feeder, these birds depend on a variety of weed seeds including greater and lesser ragweed, hemp, and a variety of grasses. Photo by Ed & Jean Schulenberg.

Harris' Sparrow

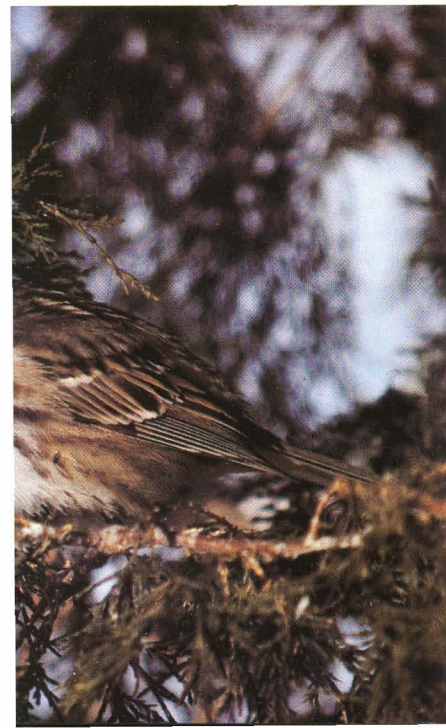
The Harris' sparrow is a bird of the Midwest, seldom found east of Michigan and Ohio. The species breeds well up in Canada where it managed to hide its nests from ornithologists until 1930. This elusiveness on the breeding grounds may strike a Kansas bird watcher as strange since the Harris' sparrow is one of the most common visitors to Kansas feeders. Like other winter sparrows, the Harris' has an appetite for small weed seeds and the smaller feeder offerings like millet and milo. Photo by Jean and Ed Schulenberg.





White-crowned Sparrow

A handsome, easily recognized sparrow, the white-crowned is another Canadian breeder that spends its winters on the southern plains. Bent describes the white-crowned on its northern breeding grounds as a nervous, high-strung bird, more fidgety than its close relation, the white-throated sparrow. Analysis of Christmas bird count information indicates two possible centers of concentration for white-crowned sparrows, one in western Texas and southeastern New Mexico, the other in the southern Appalachians and Ozarks. Like many other birds, the white-crowned shows signs of expanding its range in response to widespread bird feeding. Photo by Karl Maslowski.



Dark-eyed Junco

One of the most common visitors at a winter feeder, the dark-eyed junco is also one of the easiest to recognize. Juncos seem willing to eat almost anything offered in a bird feeder—sunflower, milo, millet, cracked corn, and even cracked wheat. Given a choice however, they prefer to eat on the ground. At least one study indicates that juncos form stable feeding groups during the winter that stake out their own territories and exclude other juncos. Photo by Jean and Ed Schulenberg.



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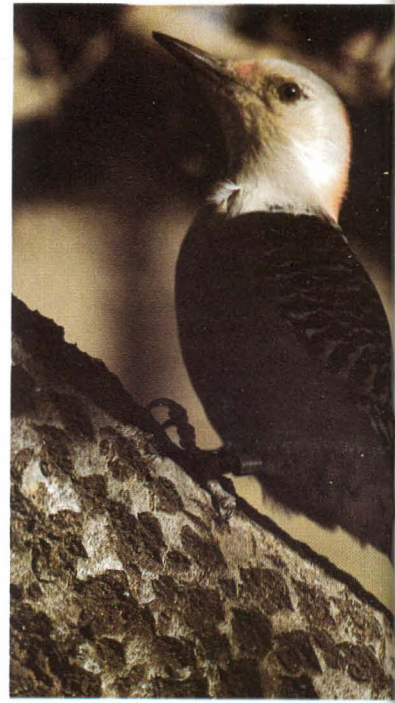
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American Goldfinch

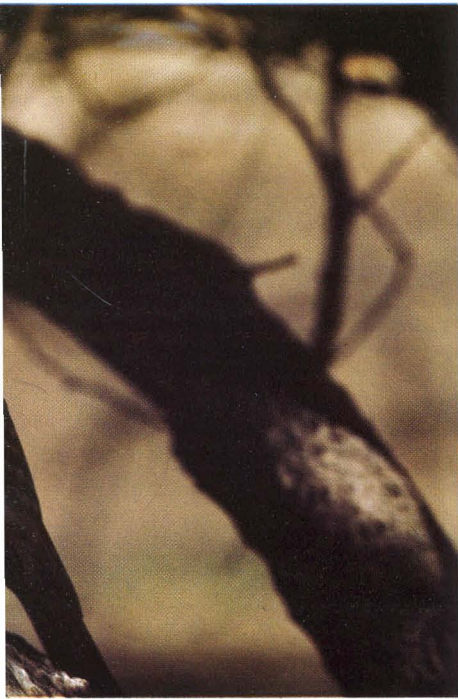
Goldfinches are inclined to move in bunches, especially during the winter. A lone goldfinch suddenly appearing at feeder almost invariably heralds the approach of a small treeful. The goldfinch is primarily a seed eater and, according to Bent, leans especially toward the seeds of composites like sunflower, thistle, ragweed, and, in summer, dandelions. At the feeder, the species seems especially fond of sunflower seeds. In mid-winter, goldfinches may be a little confusing for beginning bird watchers since they show very little of their summer brilliance. As spring approaches, the males color up by degrees, reaching their full blinding yellow by May. Photo by Jean and Ed Schulenberg.



Pine Siskin

An extremely social finch, the pine siskin is almost always found in groups which often include goldfinches, purple finches, and other species. As the name implies, the siskin breeds most often in coniferous forest but has expanded its breeding range into Kansas where it often nests in deciduous trees in city parks and backyards. These summer residents are joined in winter by other siskins moving out of the Colorado Rockies. The siskin forages on the seeds of a variety of conifers but will also feed on weed seeds and insects in clearings and along roadsides. Siskins are very fond of the waste seed found in commercial sunflower fields in Kansas. They seem to prefer thistle seed feeders in town although they can be weaned onto less expensive sunflower seed. Photo by Jean and Ed Schulenberg.





Red-bellied Woodpecker

The red-bellied is one of the largest woodpeckers that commonly visit winter feeders. Like most of the other woodpeckers, the red-bellied is fond of suet but will take cracked or shelled corn and sunflower seed as well. Some red-bellied woodpeckers stay near the northern limits of their breeding range over winter, but, generally speaking, the species seems to retreat southward a little during the coldest part of the year. Photo by Jean and Ed Schulenberg.

Tufted Titmouse

Like the nuthatches and chickadee, the tufted titmouse is a bird of the woods. Titmice aren't too common at feeders, preferring to keep to heavier timber where they forage for insects and mast. When they do turn up in the backyard, however, they aren't shy about asserting themselves. One ornithologist has observed that titmice will bluff almost any visitor to a feeder—except the blue jay. Photo by Karl Maslowski.





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