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How Do Birds Stay Warm in Winter?

By Lisa Myers

Have you ever looked out into your garden during the winter and wondered how birds handle such frigid temperatures? They can because they have evolved special adaptations. The feathers that cover their bodies are



Female Capercaillie (Sweden)
– Brooke Miller

especially adapted to keep birds both warm and dry. The feathers we see on the outside of a bird are called “contour feathers.” These feathers overlap each other as they cover the bird’s entire body and act like shingles on a house. They create a tight layer that successfully keeps moisture out while keeping the heat in. Under that top layer of feathers are even more feathers underneath.

They are the soft, fluffy “down feathers” that trap warm air keeping it close to the body. For the feathers to do their job they need constant maintenance. You can often observe birds “preening” as they run their feathers through their beak making sure they are all in their right place. Any open pockets between feathers would allow body heat to escape, or allow cold water to get down under the feathers and against the body.

Bird have adapted a special circulatory system to isolate the blood flowing throughout their legs from circulating throughout their entire body. And if you look closely, you can see specialized scales on a bird’s feet and legs. These scales help minimize heat loss. For some birds that live in snow country they have feathers that cover their legs and feet, adding another layer of insulation to help against the cold. You can see the feathered legs on this female Capercaillie photographed in Sweden on a snow-covered landscape. Birds are also smart enough to sit or stand on the leeward side of a berm, tree or cliff which keeps them out of the wind. They’ll also tuck their bill into their feathers, stand on one leg, or sit with both legs warmly underneath them; all techniques to stay warm.

As for the little birds visiting our feeders, they may huddle together at times to exchange body heat. Or will find shelter within some tree bark, or a pile of leaf litter or possibly a bird box you have hanging outside.

You may consider offering “suet” to your birds during the winter. Suet comes in a variety of flavors consisting of beef fat plus seeds, insects, fruit or even hot pepper to dissuade squirrels. This high energy food is a welcome treat during the cold months. It’s easy to offer your birds by simply hanging it outside. No mess on the ground or shells to sweep.

Winter Coupon

Mention this coupon & take...

15%

off one item



Excludes all food items or seed, sale or consignment items, excursions & optics. Not to be combined with any other offers.

Expires Mar. 31, 2022
#WINTER2022



Townsend's Warbler at Suet feeder – Brook Miller

California's Central Valley is A Winter Wonderland

Go See For Yourself

By Lisa Myers

California's Central Valley is a winter wonderland and the ultimate destination for millions of waterfowl. Birds arrive here from the Arctic and mid-west to escape the freezing temperatures and snow that cuts off their food supply. It's also where you'll find wintering Sandhill Cranes, shorebirds, hawks and eagles.

For a birder, the winter months are an exciting time of year. Every winter Let's Go Birding tours were scheduled for the Central Valley, but with the continued fears associated with Covid and transmitting the virus, organized group trips have been placed on hold. However, we encourage you to go yourself! In just a few hours or less you'll find wonderful open spaces created especially for wintering birds. Just head east into the Central Valley and you'll soon find these wintering flocks through to late February. As spring approaches the birds will start to migrate north and east to areas where they will spend the breeding season. **Here are some of the winter hot spots California is known for and we hope you will visit:**

Sacramento National Wildlife Center

(170 miles north)

– 752 Co Rd 99W, Willows, CA 95988.

Over 10,000 acres for nature.

Colusa National Wildlife Refuge

(140 miles north)

– 2180 State Hwy 20, Colusa, CA 95932.

Over 7,000 acres for nature.

Grey Lodge Wildlife Area

(179 miles north/east)

– 3207 Rutherford Rd, Gridley, CA 95948.

Over 9,000 acres protected wetlands.

Merced National Wildlife Refuge

(103 miles east)

– 7430 W Sandy Mush Rd, Merced, CA 95341.

Over 10,000 acres of wetlands, vernal pools and open space.

Cosumnes River Preserve

(102 miles north)

– 13501 Franklin Blvd, Galt, CA 95632.

Over 46,000 acres north of Sacramento.

Woodbridge Ecological Reserve

(96 miles north/east)

– 7730 W Woodbridge Rd, Lodi, CA 95242.

A CDFW One Day Land Pass costing \$4.32 per person for the specific date you wish to bird is required. You can do this on line. <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Regions/3>

Staten Island Road, Thornton, CA.

(100 miles norther/east)

– An extraordinary example of wildlife friendly farming: an opportunity for conservation. Over 9,200 acres just north of Lodi, CA. An important acquisition by the Nature Conservancy.



Cackling Geese



Sandhill Crane

PHOTO NOTES: TONY WOO TOOK THE CRANE AND WATERFOWL PHOTOS ON LET'S GO BIRDING TOURS



Snow and Ross's Geese

Before people took over California, millions of birds migrated to the Central Valley every fall. The habitat found in the Central Valley provided everything needed by the ducks, geese and swans to get through their winter. Once farming took over, we altered this landscape and turned it into orchards, crops, and now vineyards to be harvested with the seasons. As the land changed, the birds would arrive with the fall migration to find a planted orchard or field of rice. The instinctual migration of these



Great White-fronted Geese

magnificent birds was now creating a problem for the farmers, or shall we say, the farmers created a problem for the birds. Farmers did not want the birds destroying their crops, but the birds had no place to go. To solve the problem, a “complex” of open spaces was created and put aside for the birds. These areas would be safe places for the birds to winter. And more recently, farmers started to implement different harvesting practices. Instead of burning the remnants after harvesting a rice crop, farmers now leave the plant material and roots in the field. When the birds arrive they welcome the scattered rice and plant bits left behind after harvest. The birds even dig underneath the soil to get to the roots of the plants. While consuming what the farmers leave behind, they also fertilize the fields. This is a win-win and is good for the birds and the farmers. Today some farmers rotate how they flood their fields specifically for the waterfowl. This provides habitat for the wintering birds and is a great way for everyone to just get along.

With concerted effort by many organizations, waterfowl populations are doing well. For some species their

numbers are exploding, creating new challenges for the organizations that monitor their numbers. During the winter, birdwatchers and hunters are often in close proximity to each other. While birders are enjoying the birds in one field, gun shots can be heard in another field. While this can be disconcerting, it should be understood that the hunters pay a hefty fee for the privilege to hunt. As species are constantly monitored, hunters are told every year how many of a specific species they are allowed to take. The annual fees



Tundra Swans

hunters pay helps to maintain habitat for waterfowl and all the other species that also need these open spaces. Purchasing a federal duck stamp annually is another way everyone can help, “Purchasing Federal Duck Stamps is a great way to support bird habitat conservation and is one of the most successful conservation tools in our toolbox. Of every dollar spent on a duck stamp, 98 cents of the purchase goes directly to acquiring and protecting waterfowl habitat,” said Martha Williams, Service Principal Deputy Director.

When visiting wildlife refuges and protected lands you will also find other species of birds in addition to the waterfowl and cranes. Keep an eye out for an assortment of wintering shorebirds, and possible raptors like Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks. The many different species that winter in the Central Valley will start to leave in mid-February and be back on their northern breeding grounds in March. You may also find River Otters, Raccoons, Skunks and deer that also depend on these open spaces. We hope you will make some time to visit one of these Northern California winter hot spots.



Rough-legged Hawk
– Lorraine Smith

Because of the current uncertainty regarding Covid-19, we will continue to have limited group activities. What we have scheduled will be held outside. Everything is subject to change. Losgatosbirdwatcher.com website is the best place to look for updates.



Let's go Birding

Let's Go Birding is the tour division of the Los Gatos Birdwatcher.

Let's Go Birding tours get you out of your yard and into different habitats where you can experience a variety of species not found at home.

Saturday Morning Local Bird Walks

FREE



The Los Gatos Birdwatcher sponsors Saturday morning bird walks each month. Dates and locations are listed below and on our web page. These walks are free and open to all birding levels, but pre-registration is required. Everyone will have to drive themselves. Locations will be selected based on easily accessible trails allowing for social distancing and with enough parking. There will be no sharing of optics. We register participants per walk during the month the walks are scheduled. Call the store to register 408-358-9453. Walks start on-site at 8:30 AM and end around 10:00 AM. After confirmation details per walk will be provided.

Jan. 8 La Rinconada Park, Granada Way, Los Gatos. Meet near tennis court.

Jan. 15 Kevin Moran Park, 12415 Scully Ave, Saratoga.

Feb. 12 No bird walk, consider taking Lisa's Duck Workshop.

Feb. 26 No bird walk, consider taking Lisa's Raptor Workshop.

Mar. 19 Martial Cottle Park, San Jose.

Mar. 26 Picchetti Ranch Preserve, Cupertino.

Bay Area Duck Workshop

In the field with Lisa Myers
February 12 • 9 AM – 1 PM

With both salt water and fresh water habitats, every winter the San Francisco Bay Area becomes a magnet for many different species of ducks.



Ducks are also a lot of fun to identify and are a great way for the

Male Common Goldeneye
- eclipse plumage
- Nancy Turek

beginning birder to learn the skill of identification. Male ducks have striking field marks which make their ID much easier than many other types of birds. We will also study the females as they are often hanging out with the males. This workshop will take place in the field. Walking will be required on flat trails as we look for waterfowl in different park locations. You'll need optics, snacks, liquids and proper layering for cold and possibly wet weather. Rain does NOT cancel, like water off a ducks back! **Fee \$55**



**LET'S GO BIRDING
TOUR TO TEXAS**

After a two year delay Lisa is off to Texas with 12 eager participants to see the birds that winter in Texas and those that can be found along the Mexican border.

Look for trip reports in the Spring newsletter.

Winter Raptor Workshop

In the field with Lisa Myers
February 26 • 9 AM – 1 PM

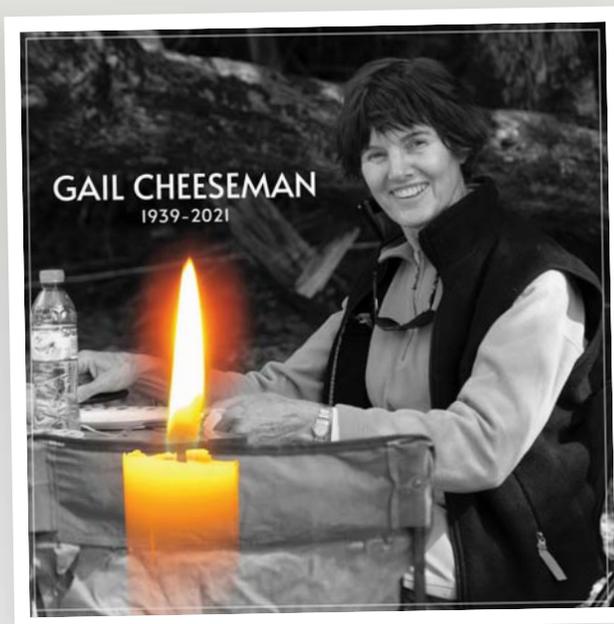
Eagles, hawks and falcons are all considered raptors. They are always a favorite because of their impressive size, field marks and hunting lifestyle. Winter is the time of year we have a higher concentration of raptors here in Northern California. We will spend our morning in the open space areas around Coyote Valley. Location details will be provided closer to the date. We will discuss the different raptor families found in the Bay Area and the field marks to look for in order to tell them apart. The raptors we hope to find include both Bald & Golden Eagles, Northern Harriers, Red-tail and Ferruginous Hawks in addition to Peregrine & Prairie Falcons, American Kestrels and Merlin. **Fee: \$55**



Juvenile Cooper's Hawk
– Larita Desempel

Her Legacy Continues

By Lisa Myers



As a Bay Area birder I had always heard of Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris. They were considered one of the premier international touring companies known for organizing superior wildlife tours to all corners of the world. Through good old-fashioned networking I learned they were in need of office support at the same time I was in need of part time work so an interview was scheduled. This would be the first time I met Doug & Gail Cheeseman. While they tour the world they always have staff taking care of business from home base and that was the position they needed to fill. After this first meeting I was hired. It was the quickest interview I ever had. They gave me a key to the office, explained how it all works, and soon departed for a month in the Antarctic to lead an expedition.

While working for the Cheesemans I learned what it took to put together exceptional, high quality tours, and making sure tour participants were prepared and made it to

their destinations in great shape and on time. Gail knew I was growing my own business *Let's Go Birding*. She appreciated my passion for birds and knew I could share that passion with their customers. International tours was not my goal, but Gail encouraged me to co-lead their tour to Costa Rica. Because she made international travel look so easy, I eventually agreed. It turned out to be a fantastic experience. To this day I continue to incorporate what I learned from Gail; she was brilliant behind the scenes and in front of customers as she made everyone feel welcome while making sure everything ran smoothly. With her blessing, I lead one tour out of the state or country each year. Gail Cheeseman passed away this last November. She touched so many people right here in California and across the entire globe, and made a difference for wildlife on every continent. She inspired and influenced many people including me and I will be forever grateful for having met and worked for her and Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris. This local, family business continues to take people all over the world. If you want to learn where they are going next please visit cheesemans.com

Now is the Time to Put Up Your Nest Boxes

Some birds make nests on the branches of trees. Using mud and grasses, the parents weave their nest within a tree, or even on the ground under bushes. These birds include American Robins, Northern Mockingbirds, California Quail and Dark-eyed Juncos just to name a few. (That is why trimming trees in the Spring is discouraged). Then there are the birds that require cavities for their nest building. They often find such cavities in dead and dying trees. However, in suburbia we often remove unhealthy trees and inadvertently remove ideal nesting sites. To help cavity nesting birds you can strategically place a nest box in your yard. Often the same birds that come to our bird feeders will use a man-made nest box when offered. These birds include, Bewick's Wrens, Western Bluebirds, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Western Screech Owls, nuthatches and even woodpeckers. Our staff can help you with any questions you might have about adding a "bird house" or nest box to your yard and we offer a wide selection of bird boxes.

- ✓ Nest boxes should not have a perch in front of the entrance. Perches provide predators a foot-hold and way into the nest box
- ✓ Nest boxes need to be waterproof from above, but also provide ventilation
- ✓ Nest boxes need to provide drainage along the bottom
- ✓ Nest boxes should have an easy access so you can clean out the box after the breeding season



- ✓ Nest boxes should be placed so they get morning sun and shelter from afternoon heat
- ✓ Nest boxes come in different sizes and need to be selected accordingly depending on the species you want to attract
- ✓ Nest box entrance holes come in different sizes to attract different species
- ✓ Nest boxes should have a rough inside wall under the entrance hole to make it easier to exit the box

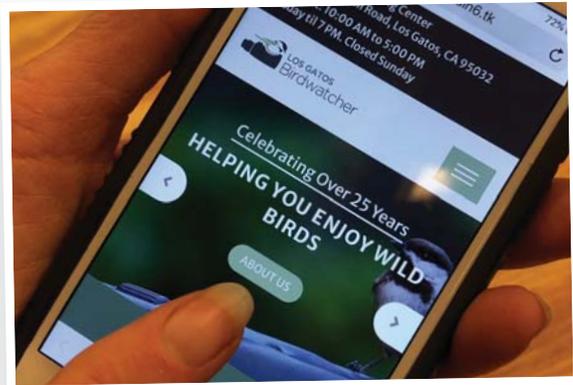
Valentine's Day is February 14

If you need ideas for what to get your special Valentines we'd be happy to help. We have all kinds of great gifts for the garden in addition to jewelry, scarves and much more. Giving her a bag of bird seed might be an unusual gift, but it will show her how much you appreciate her love of nature. And we gift wrap for free!



New Website for 2022!

Technology is ever changing and that means we needed to design a new website that meets today's demands and can be more easily viewed on cell phones. Our website will make it easier for customers to get information on the seed we sell, the products we carry and the events happening in the store and all over the world. It will be a place to easily access store tip sheets and historical newsletters. We thank all the local photographers that contributed to our new website. For information please visit losgatosbirdwatcher.com.



WORD SEARCH

– **More Birds Named After People** created by Lisa Myers

T E M M I N C K Y U G B B H F
 Y S F W O B C Y T Z H A E E C
 R S T S R G W Q J A T R L G K
 L I L E A D I A N E Z R C N I
 G I W M J D H E T C S O H I T
 W E B S Y N L C A M M W E T T
 R E G U X S E S A Y N J R T L
 L Y Z T O O S G H E T E V U I
 E Z C N X I N V E X L E L N T
 S C C A N M S I R R A H R L Z
 W A A X N I L K N A R F D E A
 E T Y R B U L L O C K Y H C K
 I K B H G E T R A P A N O B M
 L A W R E N C E R E L L U B V
 R E X H A M M O N D I B Z F T

STEJNEGER	LEACH
BARROW	LAWRENCE
GAMBEL	NUTTING
ZENAIDA	HAMMOND
ALLEN	SAY
XANTUS	NELSON
WILSON	HARRIS
TEMMINCK	GRACE
TEREK	BULLOCK
KITTLITZ	BREWER
CASSIN	BONAPARTE

Services Available from the Los Gatos Birdwatcher

- **Feeder Cleaning** – We want to help you maintain a healthy environment for your backyard birds. That is why we offer this service to clean feeders on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Bring your feeder into the store in the morning and we'll have it ready before closing. While we clean feeders for free we do ask that you consider making a minimum donation of \$5 per feeder to one of the Bay Area charities we support. You'll find collection boxes at the store.

- **Frequent Buyer Program** – Buy 9 of the same seed bags of 20# or higher at full price and get the 10th bag free. Coupons do not apply.

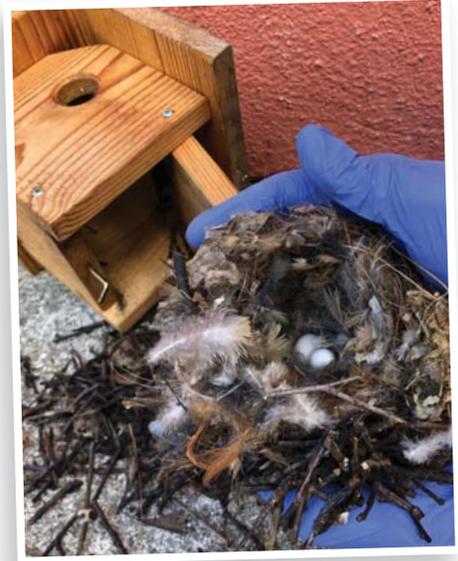
- **Help you to ID your birds** – We can help you ID that mystery bird in your yard. Just take a photo using your cell phone and email it to info@losgatosbirdwatcher.com, or drop by the store and show your photo to our staff.



We invite you to share your photos to our Facebook page and we will provide feedback.

It's time to Clean Out Your Nest Boxes

As your birds start thinking about this coming Spring's breeding season they will be looking around your yard now. The experts recommend you clean out your bird boxes at least once a year so now is the time. To make this easier, we recommend only using bird boxes that have an easy way to be cleaned. This could mean a wall that easily opens up with the adjustment of a screw, or an easy to remove and replace floor. Such openings provide you access so you can remove everything left over from the previous year's nesting season. For the 2022 breeding season your birds will want to make a new nest. So it is OK to remove everything old that you find inside. Your box may contain feathers, animal fur, lizard skin and even old eggs that never hatched. Simply remove it all. Also look for any parasites that may have taken over the nest box. If you find parasites simply dip your box in boiling water (no chemicals) and allow to dry before putting it back out in your yard. (We also carry a product in the store that is non-toxic and made to clean nest boxes). If you discover your box was never used you might want to re-locate it to a different location. Try to avoid areas too close to your feeders. Cleaning out your box will also help it last longer. If your box is too high to reach than all you can do is watch to see if a bird will clean it out itself and make a new nest.



Cleaning out a nest box used by a Bewick's Wren in 2021



LOS GATOS
Birdwatcher

King's Court Center
792 Blossom Hill Road, Los Gatos, CA 95032
408/358-9453
email: info@losgatosbirdwatcher.com
website: www.losgatosbirdwatcher.com

Find us on Facebook
and Instagram



Dates to Remember

January 17 – Martin Luther King Day

February 14 – Valentine's Day

February 21 – President's Day

March 13 – Daylight Savings Time

March 17 – St. Patrick's Day

March 20 – 1st Day of Spring



Loyal Customer Discount

Mention this coupon and take...

15% off one item

Coupon Expires March 31, 2022

#MAR2022

One Coupon per customer please.
Excludes consignment items, sales
items, excursions and optics. Not to be
combined with any other offers.

Store Hours

Please visit: www.losgatosbirdwatcher.com

