

# Seniors for the Future Winter Visitors

by Marion Hogan

One of our winter pastimes is watching the birds that visit our feeders and flit from tree to tree. We enjoy their sounds and have come to appreciate their characteristics and beauty.

The most consistent visitor is the Purple Finch. The male is colourful with raspberry red on its head, chest and tail, while the female is brown with streaked breast, heavy beak and waving flight pattern. They are about the same size as sparrows, and travel with the House Finch which is slightly smaller and with less red on the male. The female House Finch is plainer than that of the Purple Finch which has a white line behind the eye and a larger beak. We have more of these finches coming to our feeders than we had five years ago.

Another bird common to bird feeders in the winter are the Blackcapped Chickadees. These cheerful, friendly little birds flit among our Manitoba maples at the bottom of the garden picking at the branches and trunks. When it takes seeds from the feeder it flits back to the tree, eats the seed and returns to the feeder for one or two more seeds. These little birds which seem to be very active, travel in groups, sometimes with birds of other species. They are about 4 1/2 inches long, greyish coloured with a black head, white cheek patches, rusty coloured sides and white feather edges on its wings. Often they appear to be upside down tapping at the branches.

We also have one Downy woodpecker that visits our trees in the winter, feeding off eggs and grub of insects on the branches and trunk. One minute you will see it, but the next minute it will disappear as it works its way around the trunk. However, if you are patient, you will see it again in a few minutes.

The Downy is the smallest and most common woodpecker, and often appears at feeding stations. The Downy and the Chickadee enjoy suet and need some fat in their diet.

The Nuthatch and Juncos are often at the feeders at the same time as the Chickadee. The Nuthatch is a large headed, short legged, short tailed tree climbing bird which travels down a tree trunk with its head down, looking for grubs. There are two types that might visit in the winter - the White-breasted and the Red-breasted.

The Junco, which travels in flocks, is sparrow-like, slate gray coloured on the head, back and breast, and has white outer tail feathers which are noticeable in flight. They are often seen on the ground eating up the fallen seeds.

We also see Cedar Waxwings which have come to eat the small fruit off our neighbour's tree. They appear in late fall when the fruit is ripe and mushy, and again in February if there is fruit left on the tree. These times are probably during the bird's migration. The Cedar Waxwing is recognized by the smooth and silky appearance of the feathers, by its crest and red wax-like spots on its wings. Their tails



Halton Hills firefighters were quick to extinguish a pickup truck fire Tuesday. The truck was travelling on Trafalgar Road south of Highway 7 at about 4:20 p.m. when flames broke out.

have a yellow band on the tip, and they are olive green in colour. They travel in flocks and gorge on berries.

Our most striking visitor to the feeder is the Cardinal, the male with its bright red feathers and black throat, and the yellow-brown female both with pointed crests and red beaks. This bird stays in the same area all year, and because of

its colour is easily seen in the winter.

The Blue Jay is also colourful and is a frequent visitor. Its raucous call informs us of its visit and also lets us know when the feeder is empty.

Although they are not birds, we have frequent visits from the black and gray squirrels which find their way into our feeders. We used to

try various means to keep them out but found them entertaining and amusing to watch scampering from tree to tree, over the shed roof and jumping into the feeder. The squirrels and Blue Jays love peanuts and hide them for use at a later date.

Bird watching is a year round form of pleasure for us and we look forward to having our visitors again this winter.

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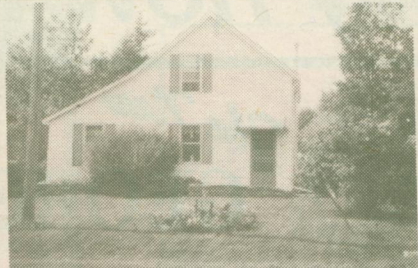
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