Get To Know Your Local Birds

**American Crow**
Like hawks, crows were once killed because people thought of them as pests. But today their numbers are coming back. In winter, crows gather in large numbers at roosting sites. In spring they break into smaller colonies and nest in dense tree stands near sources of food. Crows used to gather near agricultural fields where food sources were abundant, but now they can be found near supermarket parking lots and on city streets when compost is being picked up.

**American Goldfinch**
Although their natural habitats include fields and orchards where thistles and asters grow wild, American goldfinches are attracted to backyards with thistle feeders. In spring, the female finches are attracted to the bright yellow feathers of the males. It is fun to see large flocks hang upside down from feeders to eat. American goldfinches sometimes flock with their cousins, Lesser goldfinches.

**Anna’s Hummingbird**
This hardy bird lives year-round in the Bay Area. They will visit yards with nectar feeders or flowering plants. Anna’s hummingbirds are not bothered by human activity and will readily nest in a quiet corner of your yard if they can find food there.

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**Fun Facts**

- **Birds evolved** from theropod dinosaurs around 230 million years ago.

- **Birds are** the only animals to wear feathers.

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FUN FACTS

Watching birds can hone your power of observation.

Different shaped bird beaks tell us what foods birds like to eat. Seed eaters are conical; meat eaters are sharp and curved; nectar eaters are thin and long.

Bird feet can tell you a lot about where a particular bird lives and how they spend their time. Webbed feet are water birds. Taloned, gripping feet are birds of prey. Woodpeckers have two toes pointing forwards and two toes pointing backwards to be able to grasp trees.

BLACK PHOEBE
The phoebe is the only flycatcher bird that lives all year in the Bay Area. They build a type of nest called a mud cap. Phoebes used to attach their nests to trees or rocks with overhangs, but in modern times they seem to prefer nesting in human-made structures. If you have mud in your yard, or make mud, you may see a phoebe building a nest under your eaves in spring.

BUSHTIT
Bushtits are social, live all year in the Bay Area, and are one of the tiniest birds in the world. On winter nights, families huddle together in a ball to survive the cold weather. In spring, a male and female couple build their nest in yards that are quiet and have both cover and water. The nests look like linty old socks, but if you look closely, you may see up to fifteen tiny eggs. And when the eggs hatch, the nest becomes a ball of tiny babies that never stops moving.

CALIFORNIA SCRUB JAY
The number of scrub jays in the Bay Area has gotten smaller, perhaps due to competition for resources from their larger cousin, the crow. Although they like to nest in quiet yards, cats often hunt for them when they are young. Scrub jays do not migrate and live here all year.
**FUN FACTS**

**Birds learn** their songs from their parents. Baby birds practice songs over and over until they get the song right.

**Some birds** like parrots and ravens can actually mimic human speech as well as other sounds.

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**COOPER’S HAWK**

Once killed as pests, Cooper’s hawks have repopulated both in the suburbs and the wilderness of the Bay Area. In the early 2000s, Cooper’s hawks started nesting in small neighborhood parks in San Francisco and the Berkeley Flats. If you do things to attract birds, you will eventually see Cooper’s hawks in your yard. Be on the lookout for Sharp-shinned hawks that also like to visit yards in winter.

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**DARK-EYED JUNCO**

A hundred years ago, local juncos were only found in the forest meadows of the Santa Cruz Mountains and the coast range. Today they live in backyards and in the suburbs and have become one of the most common nesting species in the Bay Area. Most other local birds don’t start nesting before late March, but Juncos start building their nests in February, as much as six weeks earlier! Juncos often nest on the ground which makes them easy targets for predators like cats, crows and ravens. Even so, their numbers are steadily increasing.

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**HOUSE FINCH**

The House finch is typically the most common bird in our backyards, and can be encouraged to nest in your yard if you put out seeds. The size of the local finch population goes up and down based on the availability of food. Although House finches are often confused with their cousin the Purple finch, you can tell them apart if you learn their flight patterns and contact calls.
**FUN FACTS**

Migration is the time when animals travel -generally north to south- seasonally. Bird migrations are some of the longest journeys of all. The Red Knot travels nearly 20,000 miles twice a year!

Some birds, like Great horned owls do not have a keen sense of smell. Great horned owls will kill skunks for a meal!

One plant that can attract birds to your yard is the sunflower plant.

**MOURNING DOVE**

These peaceful birds like to roost at nighttime in trees with dense branches that provide cover and safety. They may come to your yard if you scatter seeds. In the spring, they nest in quiet yards that do not have a lot of activity. Although Mourning doves are found in the Bay Area all year, more are seen in the winter when doves come here from other places that are too cold.

**OAK TITMICE**

Titmice are cavity nesters. Because they naturally prefer oak trees, they are much more common in the East Bay where there are many coast live oaks, and rare in San Francisco where there are more planted pines and Cypress trees. But they can be encouraged to settle in your yard if you have the right-sized nesting box.

**GOLD-CROWNED SPARROW & WHITE CROWNED SPARROW**

Gold-crowned sparrows and White-crowned sparrows will flock together in backyards and other sites if you set up feeders and provide water in winter. Two types of White-crowned sparrows can be found in the Bay Area. Nuttall’s white-crown sparrow are here all year and are mostly found along the coast where it is foggy. In fall and winter, they are joined by a type of White-crowned sparrow called Pugetensis, who migrate from the Pacific Northwest Coast. If you watch them for a few years, you may notice a regular migration cycle – meaning that the birds will arrive and leave around the same time each year.
**FUN FACTS**

**Birds that** defy gravity and fly can do so because they are very lightweight. Their bones are essentially hollow inside, like a straw. Birds like the Great horned owl look really heavy, but weigh in at just 3 to 4 pounds.

**Not all** birds can fly. Some, like the ostrich, or penguin have dense, solid bones like mammal’s bones. But ostriches are great runners and penguins are terrific swimmers.

**Birds have** to drink water all the time. Be sure to have a clean water source for your backyard birds!

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**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET**

These tiny birds nest in the snowy boreal forests of Canada, the Rocky Mountains, and high up in the Sierra Nevada. In fall and winter, they are commonly found in suburban areas, visiting backyards with blooming plants or food sources such as insects. They only show their colorful crown feathers when agitated.

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**WESTERN BLUEBIRD**

Bluebirds were considered much rarer in the Bay Area thirty years ago than they are today. Their preferred breeding sites - oak woodlands and savannas - were diminished by the development of suburbs and shopping centers. The good news is in the last ten years, they started coming back when bluebird enthusiasts began putting up nesting boxes for them. You can find bluebirds all throughout the year in the Bay Area.

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**ROBIN**

The song of the robin begins in earnest around the spring equinox and is a sure sign that life is blooming all around us. While some robins live in the Bay Area year round, many more come to visit in the winter.