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Black bird with red and white chest

Red-winged Blackbird map, Birds of North America, maintained by the Cornell Lab of OrnithologyThe liquid, burbling "conk-a-ree!" of a male Red-winged Blackbird on territory is a sure sign of spring, or at least its pending arrival. This bird's common name derives from the sleek black males' distinctive shoulder patches, or epaulets, which flash red in flight and while the bird is singing on territory.The Red-winged Blackbird belongs to the family Icteridae, which includes the Eastern Meadowlark, Tricolored Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, and Baltimore Oriole.A Brash Bird's Secret LifeRed-winged Blackbirds are sexually dimorphic, meaning males and females have very different appearances. They also play very different roles during the breeding season.Breeding males stand sentry, ceaselessly singing and chasing intruders. Meanwhile, the streaky brown females — easy to mistake for large, pointy-billed sparrows — skulk in nearby vegetation, stealthily building nests, laying eggs and incubating, then doing much of the feeding of their young. (Audio by Paul Marvin, XC448823. Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/448823)But it's usually not just one pair that occupies a territory. This species is polygynous, meaning that one male will mate with and share territory with more than one female. Red-winged Blackbirds usually nest in loose colonies, with a male attracting up to 15 females to nest within a territory. And there's another wrinkle: Females frequently mate with males other than the territory holder, and so they often lay clutches of unknown paternity.Males chase and mob intruders of all sizes — not only competing males, but also Great Blue Herons, crows, and raptors, and even people wandering too close to their nests.Each breeding female may raise two or three clutches per season, building a new nest for each clutch. These reconstructions likely occur because new nests are sure to be free from parasites that could weaken or kill baby birds.Red-winged Blackbird by Josh Bukoski. ShutterstockNesting is a dicey game of hide-and-seek in the wetlands and fields where Red-winged Blackbirds breed. They tend to nest close to the ground, within predators' reach. The females' brown and streaky coloration helps to camouflage them at and near their nests, which are usually concealed in thick reedy vegetation, often over water. Group nesting and individual birds' diligence and aggression toward intruders provide some added security.Widespread WanderersThe Red-winged is the United States' and Canada's most widely distributed blackbird, with approximately 20 recognized subspecies. Most are very similar in appearance, with males having a pale yellow border at the epaulet's bottom edge. The red epaulet is sometimes concealed until the bird takes flight or exposes it while on territory, but the pale yellow shoulder slash is always visible. There is an exception, however: Three subspecies found in parts of California and northern Mexico are called "Bicolored Blackbirds" because males lack the yellow border and only have red epaulets, while females are a solid blackish brown instead of streaked.The related and similar Tricolored Blackbird also occurs in California. At rest, this species shows a white shoulder slash, which borders a red epaulet seen in flight and display. Sign up for ABC's eNews to learn how you can help protect birds Red-winged Blackbirds are omnivorous, feeding primarily on seeds and waste grain such as corn and rice; some small fruits such as blackberries; and also a wide variety of insects and spiders, particularly during the breeding season. Their diet varies depending upon habitat and opportunity, and these blackbirds eat various other small animals and carrion as well. Red-winged Blackbirds will visit backyard bird feeders, especially in the winter, for seed and suet.Northern populations migrate southward in fall, flying during the day. During migration and in winter, flocks can be enormous, consisting not only of Red-winged Blackbirds but also other blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds, and starlings.No Safety in NumbersThe Red-winged Blackbird's scientific name *Agelaius phoeniceus* derives from Greek, meaning, roughly, "scarlet flock member," referring to the male's wing patch and the birds' social habits. Still one of North America's most abundant birds, the Red-winged Blackbird is nonetheless a concern for conservationists. Outside breeding season, Red-winged Blackbirds and other blackbirds are frequently targeted at their large roosts in agricultural areas, where the birds can cause significant crop damage. (The Bobolink is persecuted on its South American wintering grounds for similar reasons.)For decades, control measures such as poisoning, trapping, and shooting, along with habitat loss and climate change, have resulted in a substantial decline in Red-winged Blackbird populations. Important conservation laws such as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), which protects rare and common species alike, are also under attack.ABC and other organizations have joined together in a lawsuit to restore the protections afforded by the MBTA. Please donate to support our ongoing efforts. Donate to support ABC's conservation mission! Feature Surely some of the most watched and beloved of Canada's wildlife species are the birds we see in our backyards. Robins and woodpeckers, hummingbirds and goldfinches intrigue us with their antics or cheer us with their songs. We may take our birds for granted, yet they have a lot to teach us. More Browse through a few of our Canadian species in these "At A Glance" fact sheets. Each page has basic information on some of our Canadian wildlife, with links to detailed, reputable sources such as Hinterland Who's Who and the Government of Canada. Don't see a species you need? Comments or questions? Let us know! The Great Horned Owl is one of Canadaâ€™s commonest large birds of prey. The most notable physical attributes are its large size and prominent ear tufts or "horns." A predator that hunts at night, this owl has enormous yellow eyes set in a broad face, a curved beak and claws, and long fluffy feathers. Its coloration tends mainly toward brown or grey-brown, with conspicuous barring. This birdâ€™s legendary hooting sounds like a soft yet vibrant whoo-hoo-ho-o-o. The northern cardinal is a medium-sized songbird, with males slightly larger than females. Males are bright red with a black mask around their red bill and a prominent crest on the top of their head. Females are olive brown with red on their wings, tail, and crest, and a red bill. Juveniles are similar in colour to females but have a black bill and a shorter crest. Colouring plays an important role in the lives of male northern cardinals. Males that are brighter red are more successful than their paler counterparts. They have greater reproductive success, get ranges with better food supplies, and are able to feed more frequently. At an average 18" in length, the pileated is the largest woodpecker in Canada. These colossal birds, with their striking red crest and resemblance to prehistoric pterodactyls in flight, are thought to be the inspiration for the once popular cartoon Woody the Woodpecker. As Woody had his loud laugh, pileated woodpeckers also make noise to match their size. Their drumming, reminiscent of construction machinery, can be heard up to a kilometre away. It is fairly easy to recognize a pileated woodpecker by its large size and the red crest on its head. The body is predominantly black, with thick black and white stripes reaching from the bill to the wing and chest area. The red 'moustache' along the cheek distinguishes males from females. The Purple Martin, *Progne subis*, is a conspicuous bird in many populated areas of North America during spring and summer. Averaging 17 to 20 cm in length and a wing span of 9-41 cm, it is Canadaâ€™s largest swallow. The life span of this swallow is one to five years. The Purple Martin resembles other swallows in having a slender body, long wings, and a wide beak. Males show a shiny blue-black coloration on sunny days. Females are lighter in colour, with a pale grey throat and belly. Red-breasted Nuthatches are small birds reaching about 4.5 inches in length with a thin black bill and short tail. They have a black and white striped head, white throat, grey back and rust-coloured belly. The red-winged blackbird is a medium-sized song bird, ranging in size from 17 to 23 centimetres, with a very distinct call. Males are a sleek black colour with bright red patches on the tops of their wings. These red patches are called epaulettes and are sometimes less visible while the bird is perched, when it only shows the slight yellow band found below the red epaulettes. Young males are often a dark brown colour and appear as if they are molted before they mature; however, they still retain the red patch on the shoulder. Females are less distinctive with their brown- and white-striped backs and white- and brown-striped abdomens. Their colouring often causes them to be mistaken for other species of blackbird or sometimes for sparrows. With most birds, males are more brightly coloured, and this holds true with the rose-breasted grosbeak. The males are the most attractive with black backs and heads, white rumps and bellies and rose triangular patches on their breasts. The females, however, are not as conspicuous. Females have brown streaking on both their pale under parts and darker backs. Rose-breasted grosbeaks are said to have one of the prettiest calls. It is comparable to that of the American robin but with a more melodic sound. Approximately 9â€™10 cm long. Adult males are metallic green on the upperparts, iridescent ruby red on the throat, white on the underparts and green along the sides. Adult females look similar to males but with a white throat, greyish belly and buff along the sides of the belly, sometimes with a little red on the throat. Immature males look similar to females but with red streaks down the throat. Approximately 9.5 cm long. Adult male upperparts are mainly reddish-brown with dull green on the top of their head and a white patch behind the eyes. Their throat is iridescent orange-red and has white at the top of their breast and parts of the belly; the rest of its underparts are reddish-brown. Adult females are similar to males but paler and greener; their throat is white with dark and/or iridescent spots of orange-red. Immature birds resemble the females, but immature males start to show reddish-brown upperparts before their throat colours develop. The Northern Spotted Owl is a fairly large, brown owl, 40 to 48 centimetres long, with a puffly front head and no ear tufts. The chocolate to chestnut brown feathers of the head, neck, back and under-parts have many circular or irregular white spots, for which this attractive owl is named. The Northern Spotted Owl has large, round facial discs with dark outer rims, dark brown eyes and a yellowish-green bill. For more species, visit Hinterland Who's Who, a joint program of the Canadian Wildlife Federation and Environment Canada. By Terry W. Johnson The spring bird migration is dwindling down to a trickle. Over the past several weeks, literally millions of migrating birds streaming from their winter homes in the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America have passed through Georgia. Some of them have flown over my middle Georgia home. Although I didn't see them, I am sure a smattering of migrants briefly stopped in my yard to rest and refuel before resuming their long journey. Fortunately, among the birds that did visit my backyard was one of the most beautiful of all the northbound migrants - the rose-breasted grosbeak. My wife and I first spotted a male rose-breasted grosbeak a couple of weeks ago. One warm spring morning I just happened to take a glimpse at a feeder hanging outside our dining room window. I could not believe it; a striking, male rose-breasted grosbeak was dining on black oil sunflower seeds alongside a half-dozen pine siskins. My heart was racing as I called my wife to come and take a look at a bird that rarely makes an appearance in our yard. If you ever see a male rose-breasted grosbeak, you will never forget it. You will also understand why I was so excited. The bird is roughly 8 inches long and sports a large, straw-colored bill. The bird is adorned with bold black and white plumage. The undersides of its wings are rose pink. If that isn't enough to dazzle the eyes, the male rose-breasted grosbeak sports a brilliant red triangle emblazoned on its white breast. Both the size and shape of the red triangle varies greatly from bird to bird. In fact, each marking is so unique it can be used to tell one male from another. The female's plumage is more subdued. The upper part of her body is brown while her white and buff breast is marked with fine streaking. The bird's head is highlighted with white stripes. The rose-breasted grosbeaks now being seen across the state are returning from their winter home in southern Mexico. Central America or northern South America. They are winging toward their summer homes, where they will carry out the all-important task of raising a new generation of young. A few will nest in extreme Northeast Georgia. However, the vast majority of the birds are headed for the young hardwood forests that stretch from the Midwest to portions of eastern Canada and New England. Rose-breasted grosbeaks are occasionally seen during the winter in Georgia. In fact, one was spotted last December on the annual Christmas Bird Count at Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge/Rum Creek Wildlife Management Area. However, basically we only see the birds when they pass through the Peach State on their spring and fall migrations. The grosbeaks we are now seeing are on their spring migration, which occurs from April through the middle of May. We will see them again when they head south from the middle of September through October. One of the best places to spot a rose-breasted grosbeak is at a feeder stocked with sunflower seeds. However, you can also see them perched in trees. The easiest way to locate them in thick foliage is to listen for their distinctive call, which is best described as a metallic kick sound. If you hear anything like that, look where the sound seemed to originate. If you are lucky enough to spot a rose-breasted grosbeak, unlike most birds, it will often remain in the same spot for an extended period of time. The rose-breasted grosbeak also utters a robin-like song. Typically, however, they don't sing until they reach their breeding grounds. Interestingly, unlike many songbirds, both males and females sing. The famous artist John James Audubon immortalized the rose-breasted grosbeak in a painting that appeared in his epic volume "The Birds of America." An interesting footnote to history relates that Audubon sketched a bird unknown to him while traveling through the Indiana Territory in September 1810. Believing he has discovered a previous un-described species, he named it a variegated grosbeak. Later the bird was correctly identified as an immature rose-breasted grosbeak. Within its breeding range the rose-breasted grosbeak is sometimes called the potato bug bird. The bird earned this name because it voraciously devours Colorado potato beetles. Some studies have found that the when potato beetles are abundant, they make up a 10th or more of the birds' diet. Consequently, long ago farmers became fond of these black and white birds when they realized grosbeaks helped control the dreaded pests that threatened their potato crops. The rose-breasted grosbeak is what biologists call a neotropical migrant. These are birds that nest in North America and winter in the Caribbean, Mexico, Central or South America. Populations of far too many of these long-distance migrants are rapidly dwindling. Sadly, the rose-breasted grosbeak is one of the birds suffering a decline. Surveys suggest that its numbers are dropping at a rate of 0.8 percent per year. A number of factors are likely contributing to this decline. On their wintering grounds, the species is suffering habitat loss. In addition, south of the border the birds are trapped and sold as pets. Here in North America, another problem is that forests within the breeding grounds are being cut up into smaller and smaller pieces - forest fragmentation. Additionally, since the rose-breasted grosbeak prefers to nest in young hardwood forests, as these forests mature, each year the birds have fewer places to nest. If that isn't enough, their nests are parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds. Brown-headed cowbirds don't build their own nests. Instead, they lay their eggs in the nests of other birds such as rose-breasted grosbeaks. When this happens, in all too many cases the birds that built the nest end up raising cowbirds instead of their own young. If you would like to attract one or more rose-breasted grosbeaks to your feeder, keep it full of black oil sunflower seeds. Also, keep birdbaths full of clean water. Recently two friends that live in Texas called to tell me they had just seen a flock (sometimes called a gross) of 14 rose-breasted grosbeaks bathing in a birdbath in their Aransas Pass yard. If your efforts prove successful in attracting are a grosbeak or two, you will be able to feast your eyes on one of North America's most extraordinarily beautiful birds. In addition, you will gain the satisfaction of knowing that you provided them with a much-needed place to rest, feed, drink and bathe before resuming their epic migration. Terry W. Johnson is a former Nongame program manager with the Wildlife Resources Division, a backyard wildlife expert, and executive director of TERN, the friends group of the Nongame Conservation Section. (Permission is required to reprint this column. Contact rick.lavender@dnr.ga.gov.) Learn more about TERN, The Environmental Resources Network, at "Out My Backdoor" columns archive.

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