

## Top Ten Favorite Birds in Olmsted County

These ten birds are among the most common and colorful birds of the many species found in Olmsted County. Other species such as the American crow, House finch, Starling and House sparrow (actually a weaver finch) are common here too, but these ten are the favorites for many people. If you wish, you can mark the box next to the name when you see these birds.

**American Robin**



The male American Robin sings a lovely and continuous song often described as a 'cheerily' carol. American Robins make different sounds in communicating information. When a predator is near, robins will emit a "peek! tut tut tut" warning call. During the nesting season, these birds make a high-pitched sound especially when they see a hawk or other birds of prey. In response to this call, other robins will repeat the sound and stop their movements.

**Did you know?** Although the appearance of a robin is considered a harbinger of spring, the American Robin actually spends the winter in much of its breeding range. You're much less likely to see them, though, because they spend less time in yards and congregate in large flocks during winter.

**Northern Cardinal**



Cardinals are non-migratory and they gather in big flocks during winter. The male cardinal is the defender of the breeding territory and can spend hours fighting his reflection that he sees in glass surfaces. Summer diet is mostly insects. In winter they rely on seeds and berries. They will come to feeders, often the first to visit in early dawn and last to come at dusk, so may be missed by many casual observers.

**Did you know?** During the breeding season, males may sing 200 or more songs per hour in the early morning hours. Mated pairs will often sing duets together.

The red color of the Cardinal's feathers is the result of pigments called carotenoids. The amount of the pigment ingested and deposited in the feathers influences the quality and depth of their coloration.

**Downy Woodpecker**



The Downy Woodpecker is less vigilant in looking for predators and more successful at foraging when in a multi-species flock. It will readily join chickadees or other birds mobbing a predator, but it remains quiet and does not actually do the mobbing. Male and female Downy Woodpeckers may stay in the same areas in winter, but the male feeds more on small branches and weed stems, and the female feeds more on large branches and tree trunks. Males appear to keep females from foraging in the more productive spots. When the male is removed from a woodlot, the female shifts her foraging to the smaller branches.

**Did you know?** The Downy Woodpecker uses food sources that larger woodpeckers cannot, such as gold-enrod galls. Downies prefer larger galls, using the exit tube constructed by the larva to extract it.

**Blue Jay**



Blue jays are known to mimic the sound of hawks such as the red-shouldered hawk. These warning calls may be used to frighten and deceive other birds into believing that a hawk is around. This sound is usually heard when the jays are foraging and want to get the food of other birds near them.

Blue jays are very territorial, and will often chase cats, dogs and even humans who go near their nests and feeding areas.

**Did you know?** The blue jay's vivid blue color is not really blue. The blue color results from light refraction due to the feather's construction. If you hold the feather up to a light source and look through it, you will see that it is actually grayish-brown.

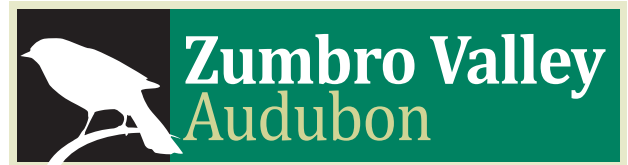
**White-breasted Nuthatch**



Nuthatches are probably one of the easiest backyard birds to identify. Known as the "upside down" bird, it is often observed creeping headfirst down tree trunks while searching cracks and crevices for insect food. Nuthatches jam nuts and seeds into tree bark, and hammer or "hatch" the food open with their bills. In winter, Nuthatches join foraging flocks led by chickadees or titmice. These flocks may protect the birds from predators by the vigilance of the other birds. One study found that if titmice were removed from a flock, nuthatches were more wary and reluctant to come to exposed bird feeders.

**Did you know?** The name Nuthatch probably results from corruption of the word "nuthack" which refers to its habit of hacking away at a seed with its beak until it opens.

## Top Ten Favorite Birds in Olmsted County



### □ Eastern Bluebird



Like the other bluebirds, the eastern bluebird prefers to nest in open fields, meadows, gardens and parks where trees are scattered and grasses are short. In North America, eastern bluebird populations have rebounded due to the extensive installation of nest boxes in rural areas.

The male Bluebird does a "Nest Demonstration Display" at the nest cavity to attract the female. He brings nest material to the hole, goes in and out, and waves his wings while perched above it. That is pretty much his contribution to nest building; the female Eastern Bluebird builds the nest and incubates the eggs.

**Did you know?** Eastern Bluebirds typically have more than one successful brood each year. Young produced in early nests usually leave their parents in summer, but young from later nests frequently stay with their parents over the winter.

### □ Canada Goose



Canada (not Canadian) geese are adaptable to many habitats and may thrive wherever grasses, grains, or berries are available. Typically, the birds summered in northern North America and flew south when cold weather arrived. Many still do, but certain populations of the Canada Goose are not migrating as far south in the winter as they used to. This northward range shift has been attributed to changes in farm practices that make waste grain more available in fall and winter, as well as changes in hunting pressure and climate. Some Canada geese have become permanent residents of parks, golf courses, suburban developments, and other human habitats across much of North America. In some areas, such as airports, they are so numerous that they are considered a nuisance.

**Did you know?** Just 50 geese can produce two and a half tons of excrement in a year.

### □ Mallard



The Mallard is the ancestor of nearly all domestic duck breeds (except the Muscovy Duck). Many of the domestic breeds look like the wild birds, but usually are larger. They are variable in plumage, often lacking the white neck ring or having white on the chest. Feral domestic ducks breed with wild Mallards and produce a variety of forms that often appear with wild ducks, especially in city parks.

The Mallard has given rise to a number of populations around the world that have changed enough that they could be considered separate species. The "Mexican Duck" of central Mexico and extreme SW United States, and the Hawaiian Duck both are closely related to the Mallard, and in both, the male is dull like the female.

**Did you know?** Mallard pairs are generally monogamous, and pairs form long before the spring breeding season. Only the female incubates the eggs and takes care of the ducklings.

### □ Indigo Bunting



Indigo Buntings are actually black; the diffraction of light through their feathers makes them look blue. This explains why males can appear many shades from turquoise to black. They are more common now than when the pilgrims first landed due to an increase in their favorite habitat of woodland edges, such as power line clearings and along roads.

Indigo buntings migrate at night, using the pattern of stars nearest the North Star to guide them. In captivity, these birds will become disoriented if they can't see the stars in April/May and September/October.

**Did you know?** The sequences of notes in Indigo Bunting songs are unique to local neighborhoods. Males a few hundred meters apart generally have different songs. Males on neighboring territories often have the same or nearly identical songs.

### □ Chickadee



The Black-capped Chickadee has a great memory – it can remember where it hid its food up to 28 days after hiding it. More than that, it can remember thousands of hiding places at a time!

The Chickadee can also adjust its body temperature at night to conserve energy, dropping it about 10-12 degrees Celsius from its daytime temperature. Breeding pairs and nonbreeders join into flocks outside of the breeding season. Nonbreeders may be members of several flocks, with a different position in the dominance hierarchy of each flock.

**Did you know?** The chickadee's simple-sounding calls (chick-a-dee-dee) have been found to be extremely complex and language-like. They code information on identity and recognition of other flocks as well as predator alarms and contact calls. One study showed that the number of "dee" s was related to the degree of danger perceived by the bird - more "dee"s equaled more danger.