

Red-breasted Nuthatch Profile

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



If you've ever seen a Red-breasted Nuthatch in action, you'll agree they are very energetic. Like other nuthatches, they make their way down a tree headfirst. This helps them search for grubs and insects in the tree bark that other up-climbing birds miss. This unique behavior has earned them the nickname of the "upside-down bird."

The name nuthatch comes from the Old English "nuthack," given to these birds for their method of opening seeds. First, they wedge a seed into a crevice, then hack at it with their long, sturdy bills.



Interesting Facts:

Family: Sittidae

Scientific Name: *Sitta Canadensis*

Location: The breeding range of the Red-breasted Nuthatch extends from northwestern Canada to California, and through most of the western states. You'll also find it across the northern U.S., including the upper Great Lakes region. They're also found from Newfoundland south to the Appalachian Mountains. Their range is expanding southward all the time.

Migration: In some years, Red-breasted Nuthatches head south; some years, they do not. Though the reasons they migrate are not yet fully understood, overpopulation or food shortages are good assumptions. In years they migrate, their range stays within the U.S., and excludes most of Florida and the southern tip of Texas.

Nesting:	<p>They are cavity nesters, and the height they build at varies, but is generally under 20 feet. They stuff the cavity with small pieces of wood and grass, and line it with softer materials like fur and feathers. Males help with nest building, but females do most of the work. They occasionally use nest boxes.</p> <p>In April and May, the female lays as many as 6 eggs. Incubation lasts 12 to 14 days, and is done mainly by the female. The eggs are white or creamy with brown spots. Young birds generally leave the nest about 18-21 days after hatching.</p>
Diet:	<p>They eat beetles, pine woodborers, spiders, and insects from crevices of tree trunks or branches. They also pick flying insects out of the air with their long bills. In winter, they eat the seeds of cones and visit feeders. Their favorite foods are sunflower seed, peanuts in the shell, safflower, and suet.</p>
Size and Color:	<p>They are short-tailed and about the size of a chickadee, with grayish coloring above and orange-ish below. Adults are approximately 4-1/2" in length. They are easily recognizable by their dark eyestripe, grayish uppers, and orange-colored underparts. Female underparts are typically not as deeply colored as males.</p>
Song:	<p>They make "ank, ank, ank" sounds like the tooting of a small horn.</p>
Special Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Red-breasted Nuthatches are known to become tame enough to eat from your hand. ● When nesting, adults coat the entrance of their nest cavity with tree pitch to prevent insects, small mammals, and other birds from entering the nest cavity.
Attract Them:	<p>The Red-breasted Nuthatch is attracted to yards with medium-sized coniferous (cone bearing) trees. It will visit feeders that offer sunflower, safflower, peanuts, or suet.</p>