Red-breasted Nuthatch

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

If you've ever seen a Red-breasted Nuthatch in action, you'll agree they're a high octane species. They make their way down a tree headfirst, searching for grubs and insects in the crevices that other up-climbing species miss. This unique behavior has earned them the nickname of the "upside-down bird." Easy to recognize, they are short-tailed and about the size of a chickadee, with grayish coloring above and orange-ish below.

The name nuthatch comes from the Old English "nuthack," assigned 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, through most of the western states, as well as across the northern U.S. border, including the upper Great Lakes region. They're also found from Newfoundland south to the Appalachians. Its southern range is continually expanding.

Migration: The migration patterns of the Red-breasted Nuthatch are irregular. Some years they head south; some years they do not. Though the reasons they vacate their traditional winter range are not yet fully understood, overpopulation or food shortages are reasonable assumptions. In years they migrate, their range stays within the U.S., and excludes most of Florida and southwest Texas.

Nesting: 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.

Throughout April and May, the females lays as many as 6 eggs. Incubation lasts 12 to 14 days, as is performed mainly by the female. The eggs are white or creamy with brown spots. Young

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	birds generally leave the nest about 18-21 days after hatching.
Diet:	They extract 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 favorites are sunflower seed, peanuts in the shell, safflower, and suet.
Size and Color:	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.
Song:	This bird has one of the most unusual-sounding songs: a tinny, repetitive ank, ank, ank, that mimics the tooting of a small horn.
Special Characteristics:	• 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 deter insects, small mammals, and other birds from entering the nest cavity.
Attracting:	The Red-breasted Nuthatch is attracted to yards with medium-sized coniferous trees and will visit feeders that offer sunflower, safflower, peanuts, or suet.
Life Span:	Unknown.

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