

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta canadensis

An intense bundle of energy at your feeder, Red-breasted Nuthatches are tiny, active birds of north woods and western mountains. These long-billed, short-tailed songbirds travel through tree canopies with chickadees, kinglets, and woodpeckers but stick to tree trunks and branches, where they search bark furrows for hidden insects. Their excitable yank-yank calls sound like tiny tin horns being honked in the treetops.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

A small, compact bird with a sharp expression accentuated by its long, pointed bill. Red-breasted Nuthatches have very short tails and almost no neck; the body is plump or barrel-chested, and the short wings are very broad.

Color Pattern

Red-breasted Nuthatches are blue-gray birds with strongly patterned heads: a black cap and stripe through the eye broken up by a white stripe over the eye. The underparts are rich rusty-cinnamon, paler in females.

Behavior

Red-breasted Nuthatches move quickly over trunks and branches probing for food in crevices and under flakes of bark. They creep up, down, and sideways without regard for which way is up, and they don't lean against their tail the way woodpeckers do. Flight is short and bouncy.

Habitat

Red-breasted Nuthatches are mainly birds of coniferous woods and mountains. Look for them among spruce, fir, pine, hemlock, larch, and western red cedar as well as around aspens and poplars. In northeastern North America you can also find them in forests of oak, hickory, maple, birch, and other deciduous trees.

Cool Facts

- The Red-breasted Nuthatch collects resin globules from coniferous trees and plasters them around the entrance of its nest hole. It may carry the resin in its bill or on pieces of bark that it uses as an applicator. The male puts the resin primarily around the outside of the hole while the female puts it around the inside. The resin may help to keep out predators or competitors. The nuthatch avoids the resin by diving directly through the hole.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 4.3 inches
- Wingspan - 7.1 - 7.9 inches
- Weight - 0.3 - 0.5 ounces

