

Snow Bunting

Plectrophenax nivalis

Appropriately named, the Snow Bunting is a bird of the high Arctic and snowy winter fields. Even on a warm day, the mostly white plumage of a bunting flock evokes the image of a snowstorm.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

- Small songbird.
- Lots of white in the plumage.
- Underside white.
- Large white patches in wings.
- Brownish on back and face.
- Black tail with white outer feathers.

Male Description

Wings nearly completely white at base, with black tips, and small black spot on leading edge.

Breeding (Alternate Plumage: Head, nape, breast, belly, rump and outer tail feathers white; back, wingtips, and central tail feathers black. Bill black.

Nonbreeding (Basic) Head, breast, belly, flanks, and rump white. Forehead, crown, nape, and face feathers tipped with brown. Feathers of back and parts of wings black with white or rufous tips. Faint brick red band across top of chest. Bill yellowish orange with black tip.

Female Description

Wingtips brownish black, with much dark across leading edge of wings. Rear and inner section of wings white. Bill yellowish orange. Breeding (Alternate) Plumage: Head grayish, with indistinct dusky streaking. Nonbreeding (Basic) Plumage: Head, breast, belly, flanks, and rump white. Forehead, crown, nape, and face feathers tipped with brown. Feathers of back and parts of wings black with white or rufous tips. Faint brick red band across top of chest.

Immature Description

Similar to adult, but more dark on wings.

Cool Facts

- The male Snow Bunting returns to its high Arctic breeding grounds in early April, when temperatures can still dip as low as -30° C (-22° F) and snow still covers most of the ground. The female does not return until four to six weeks later.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 5.9 inches
- Wingspan - 11.8 inches
- Weight - 1.1 - 1.6 ounces

