

WINTER BIRDING IN BURNABY

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRDS THAT MAKE BURNABY THEIR WINTER HOME OR TRAVEL DESTINATION? HERE'S HOW!

by Irene Lau

Were you one of the many people who started bird watching during the pandemic? If you discovered your feathered neighbours while looking out the window, while working or doing online classes at home, or if you noticed them while on your daily walks to get outside for exercise and fresh air, you aren't alone!



White Throated Sparrow (male) (credit: Cameron Montgomery)

Despite being in the middle of a bustling metropolis, Burnaby is a wonderful place to go birding. You can bird anywhere - right in urban centres, your back yard or one of the city's many green spaces. There are songbirds you can see all over Burnaby from backyards to bus stops. Waterfowl like ducks and geese can be seen at Burnaby Lake, Deer Lake or the big pond at Central Park as well as along the Brunette or Fraser Rivers or along Burrard inlet.

Due to the west coast's temperate climate, there are many birds that make Metro Vancouver their year-round home. This area is situated on the migration path known as the Pacific Flyway, which some birds use to travel from north to south in the Spring and Fall. Some stop off in the area to rest and refuel before the long journey south in the Fall or return north in the Spring. However, some birds from the north migrate here to spend their winter as it is still warmer here. You will see a wide variety of birds in Burnaby year round!



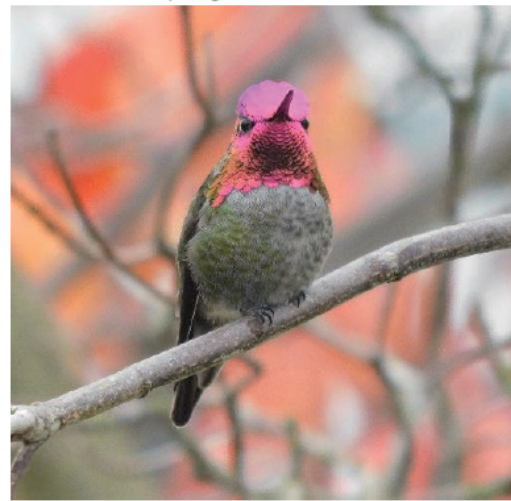
Bufflehead (male) (credit: Chee Yong)

One of the great things about birding is that it is open to everyone! You can start at any age, and you don't need a lot of equipment to start since there are many birds you can see without binoculars. It is a great activity for kids to spark their connection to nature. When Metro Vancouver Regional Parks hosted its annual Christmas Bird Count for Kids in 2018, we met Cameron Montgomery. He commented about first noticing birds while walking to school. "I started learning more and more about birds from various books and later discovered Ebird, an app that keeps track of your sightings and helps you find specific birds in your area." He added, "Birding is a great activity for youth as it is relaxing, and it gets us outside."

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Cameron committed to developing his observation skills along with bird photography. Earlier this year, he was recognized by BC Field Ornithologists and named one of the recipients of the 2021 Young Birder Award.

However, you can start at any age. I grew up on one of Burnaby's busiest roads and knew only about 5 species of birds until I started volunteering as an adult in 2010 with the Burnaby Lake Park Association. Each year, I learn more - whether it's a bird song or where to look for a certain type of bird.



Anna's Hummingbird (male) (credit: Cameron Montgomery)

HOW TO "BIRD" Whenever you are outside or able to look out a window, look for movement and listen for sounds. Note the bird's size, shape, colour, behaviour, sounds, and habitat. Pay attention to markings such as bill size and shape, as well as patterns of stripes on the body and wings.



Long-Billed Dowitcher (credit: Irene Lau)

This takes practice to notice details and some birds feather colours provide very good camouflage. However, using the following guide can help to get you started:

1. Where did you see it?
2. When did you see it? (Migration)
3. What size was it? (Compare to a known common bird like a robin or goose)
4. What were the main colours? (Males and females can look different as can young birds. Birds also replace their feathers during a process called moulting)
5. What was the bird doing? Was it on the water or perched in a tree?

With the information in this article, you can consult a field guide, app, or an experienced birder to complete the identification.

Here are birds you might see around Burnaby this winter:

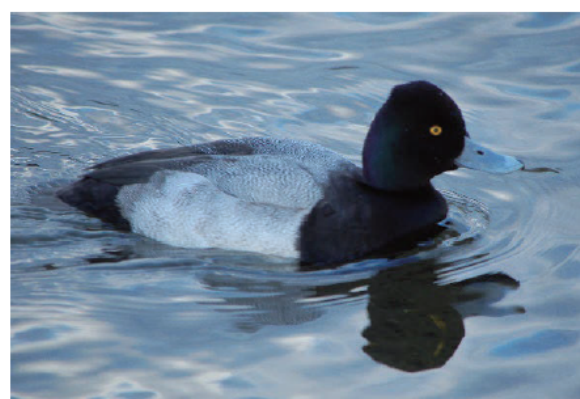
- Anna's Hummingbird
- Ruby Crowned Kinglet
- White-throated Sparrow
- Brown Creeper



Ruby Crowned Kinglet (male) (credit: Cameron Montgomery)

- Long-billed Dowitcher
- Green-winged Teal
- Northern Pintail
- Lesser Scaup
- Bufflehead
- Hooded Merganser

To learn more about birding in Burnaby this winter, be sure to check out the "Resources" section at BurnabyLakePark.ca for tools to host your own bird count as well as suggestions for apps, guide books, and websites. Also, check back in the new year for programs sponsored by Burnaby Lake Park Association.



Lesser Scaup (male) (credit: Irene Lau)