

Birding Fun Facts

- Every autumn **Black-capped Chickadees** allow brain neurons containing old information to die, replacing them with new neurons so they can adapt to changes in their social flocks and environment even with their tiny brains.
- **American White Pelican** embryos squawk before hatching to express discomfort if conditions get too hot or cold.
- **Ospreys** are unusual among hawks in possessing a reversible outer toe that allows them to grasp with two toes in front and two behind. Barbed pads on the soles of the birds' feet help them grip slippery fish. When flying with prey, an Osprey lines up its catch head first for less wind resistance.
- Although breeding and nonbreeding **Snow Buntings** look quite different, the change from nonbreeding to breeding plumage isn't caused by growing in a new set of feathers (molt). The change from brownish to pure white happens when males rub their bellies and heads on the snow, wearing down the brown feather tips to reveal immaculate white features below.
- The **Peregrine Falcon** is a very fast flier, averaging 25-34 mph in traveling flight, and reaching speeds up to 69 mph in direct pursuit of prey. During its spectacular hunting stoop from heights of more than 0.62 miles, the peregrine may reach speeds of 200 mph as it drops toward its prey.
- **Brown Thrashers** are accomplished songsters that may sing more than 1,100 different song types and include imitations of other birds, including Chuck-will's-widows, Wood Thrushes, and Northern Flickers.
- A migrating **Bobolink** can orient itself with the earth's magnetic field, thanks to iron oxide in bristles of its nasal cavity and in tissues around the olfactory bulb and nerve. Bobolinks also use the starry night sky to guide their travels.
- **Hooded Merganser** ducklings leave their nest cavity within 24 hours of hatching. First, their mother checks the area around the nest and calls to the nestlings from ground level. From inside the nest, the little fluffballs scramble up to the entrance hole and then flutter to the ground, which may be 50 feet or more below them. In some cases, they have to walk half a mile or more with their mother to the nearest body of water.
- The **Northern Shrike**, like other shrikes, kills more prey than it can immediately eat or feed to nestlings. Such behavior was characterized by early observers as "wanton killing," but the Northern Shrike stores excess prey to eat later. Storing food is an adaptation for surviving periods of food scarcity.
- **Great Horned Owls** have large eyes, pupils that open widely in the dark, and retinas containing many rod cells for excellent night vision. Their eyes don't move in their sockets, but they can swivel their heads more than 180 degrees to look in any direction. They also have sensitive hearing, thanks in part to facial disc feathers that direct sound waves to their ears.
- The **Green Heron** is one of the world's few tool-using bird species. It often creates fishing lures with bread crusts, insects, and feathers, dropping them on the surface of the water to entice small fish.
- The male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** defends a small territory of prime nesting reeds. He may attract up to eight females to nest within his area. The male helps feed nestlings, but usually only in the first nest established in his territory. The other females have to feed their young all by themselves.
- **Wood Ducks** pair up in January, and most birds arriving at the breeding grounds in the spring are already paired. The Wood Duck is the only North American duck that regularly produces two broods in one year.
- **Sandhill Cranes** are known for their dancing skills. Courting cranes stretch their wings, pump their heads, bow, and leap into the air in a graceful and energetic dance.