

# Dark-eyed Junco

# Dark-eyed Junco

## Appearance

Sparrow-sized bird, with five subspecies in North America, of which the slate-colored subspecies is by far the most common and likely to be seen in DuPage County. Sexually dimorphic with the male having a plain, gray head and body, contrasting with white belly and undertail. Female may have some brown in head and body. All have a pale pink bill and white outer tail feathers that are visually prevalent in flight.



Male

Plain, gray head and body, contrasting with white belly and undertail.



Female

Gray-brown head and body with white underbelly and undertail. Brownish flanks.

# Dark-eyed Junco Sounds

From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/>

## SONGS

A high-pitched machine gun staccato, with different tempos.

## CALLS

A high pitched *stip*, or *tzeet* in flight.

Listen to the songs and calls at:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Dark-eyed\\_Junco/sounds](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Dark-eyed_Junco/sounds)

# Dark-eyed Junco

## Diet

The Dark-eyed Junco is primarily a seed eater but will eat insects during breeding. Seeds of chickweed, buckwheat, lamb's quarters, sorrel, and the like making up about 75% of their year-round diet. Insects consumed will include beetles, moths, butterflies, caterpillars, ants, wasps, and flies.



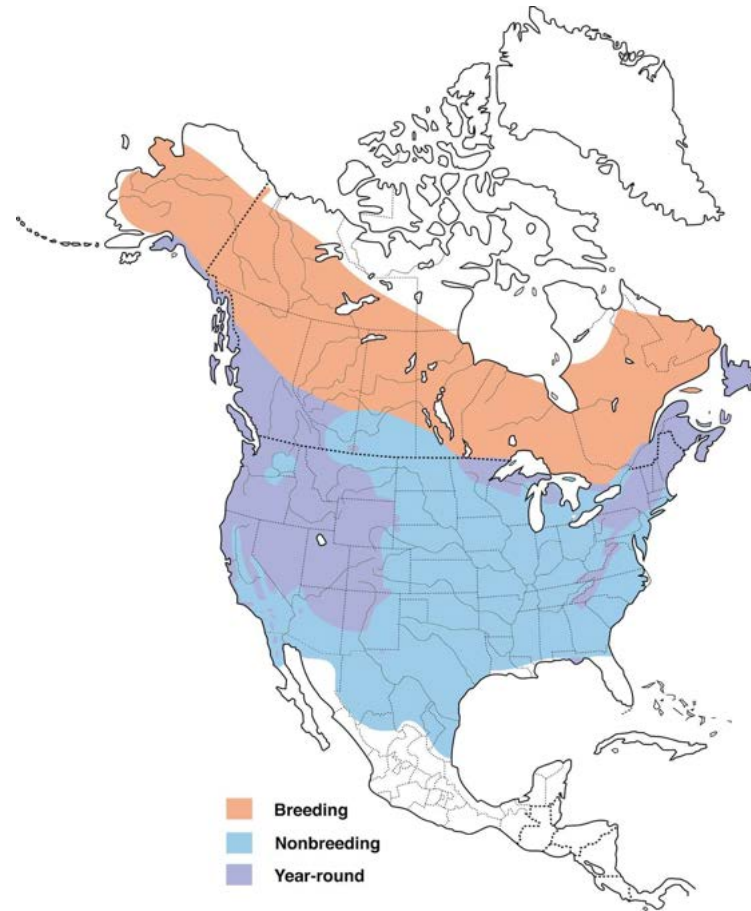
The Dark-eyed Junco is primarily a seed eater.



A Dark-eyed Junco eating seeds in winter.

# Dark-eyed Junco Range

The arrival of Dark-eyed Juncos signals the start of winter for residents of DuPage County. They breed in Canada and will winter throughout the United States. Depending upon the weather, they may start migrating south in September, but will typically arrive as early as October in DuPage County. They stay through winter and generally begin to migrate back north in April.



Map: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/  
Dark-eyed\\_Junco/maps-range](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Dark-eyed_Junco/maps-range)



## Dark-eyed Junco Habitat

The Dark-eyed Junco breeds in both coniferous and deciduous forests. But during winter and in migration in DuPage County, they can be seen in a wider variety of habitats, including woodlands, fields, and yards. They are abundant in winter in DuPage County.



Junco in coniferous forest



Junco in deciduous forest



Junco in suburban yard habitat, which is common in DuPage County

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## Behavior

Dark-eyed Juncos will typically hop along the ground, foraging or pecking through leaf litter to find food. They are highly energetic and will burst off the ground quickly to catch insects if necessary. They will typically flash their white tail feathers while flying. Juncos are very agile flyers and can move through tangles and thickets easily. There tends to be a pecking order among Juncos, and early arrivals at winter feeders will chase off later arrivals.



Male Junco looking for food in leaf litter.



## Dark-eyed Junco Literature/Prose

“There is not an individual in the Union who does not know the little Snow-bird,” declared John James Audubon, writing about the Dark-eyed Junco almost 200 years ago.

Many people in the United States today still think of this familiar songbird as the “snowbird,” since it seems to show up in backyards and other suburban habitats just as winter settles in.





## Dark-eyed Junco Feeders

Juncos are frequent visitors to feeders. They seem to prefer millet over sunflower seeds, but generally are indiscriminate at feeders.



Seeds spread out on a table attracted five Dark-eyed Juncos and one American Tree Sparrow.

# Dark-eyed Junco

## Name

### Common name

Dark-eyed Junco

*Dark-eyed*: Descriptive of the bird's eye

*Junco*: Spanish word for "rush," which is a marsh plant. It ultimately derives from the Latin *juncus*, meaning "rushes." Ironically, Juncos are typically not seen in marshy habitat.



Photo: Cathy Pondelicek

### Scientific name

*Junco hyemalis*

*Junco hyemalis*: Meaning "Junco of the winter" as *hyemalis* means "of the winter."

The Dark-eyed Junco was described by Carl Linnaeus in his landmark 1758 10th edition of *Systema Naturae* as *Fringilla hyemalis*. The description consisted merely of the laconic remark "F[ringilla] nigra, ventre albo. ("A black 'finch' with white belly"), a reference to a source, and a statement that it came from America.

Linnaeus's source was Mark Catesby, an English naturalist, who described the Slate-colored Junco before binomial nomenclature as his "snow-bird", *moineau de neige*, or *passer nivalis* ("snow sparrow") thus:

The Bill of this Bird is white: The Breast and Belly white. All the rest of the Body black; but in some places dusky, inclining to Lead-color. In Virginia and Carolina they appear only in Winter: and in Snow they appear most. In Summer none are seen. Whether they retire and breed in the North (which is most probable) or where they go, when they leave these Countries in Spring, is to me unknown.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark-eyed\\_junco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark-eyed_junco)