

Northern Cardinal

Northern Cardinal

Appearance

Fairly large, plump bird with a distinctive crest on the top of its head;
a short, thick cone-shaped bill; and a relatively long tail.

Sometimes appears hunched when perched with tail straight down. Sexually dimorphic.



Male

Pale pinkish-orange bill.

Overall bright red with black face and throat.



Female

Pale pinkish-orange bill.

Overall pale brown, with red tinges in crest, wings and tail;
blackish around bill.

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Male (left) and female (right)

Northern Cardinal

Appearance

Immature males and females are similar, with dark bills and plumage like adult females, but browner overall.



Immature Northern Cardinal



Immature Northern Cardinal

Northern Cardinal

Sounds

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

SONGS

Both male and female Northern Cardinals sing. The song is a loud string of clear down-slurred or two-parted whistles, often speeding up and ending in a slow trill. The songs typically last 2 to 3 seconds. Syllables can sound like the bird is singing *cheer, cheer, cheer* or *birdie, birdie, birdie*. Males in particular may sing throughout the year, though the peak of singing is in spring and early summer.

CALLS

Scientists have described at least 16 different calls for the Northern Cardinal, but the one you'll hear most commonly is a loud, metallic chip. Cardinals make this call when warning off intruders to their territory, when predators are near, as females approach their nests, and by both sexes as they carry food to the nest or when trying to get nestlings to leave the nest. When one member of a pair is about to feed the other, either bird may make a softer *took* note.

Listen to the songs and calls at:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Cardinal/sounds

Northern Cardinal

Diet

A wide variety of seeds and fruits, and occasionally buds and blossoms.
They also supplement their diet with various insects, which they feed exclusively to their young.



Their thick bills, tongues, and strong jaw muscles can extract and crack very hard seeds.



They usually forage for food on or near the ground.

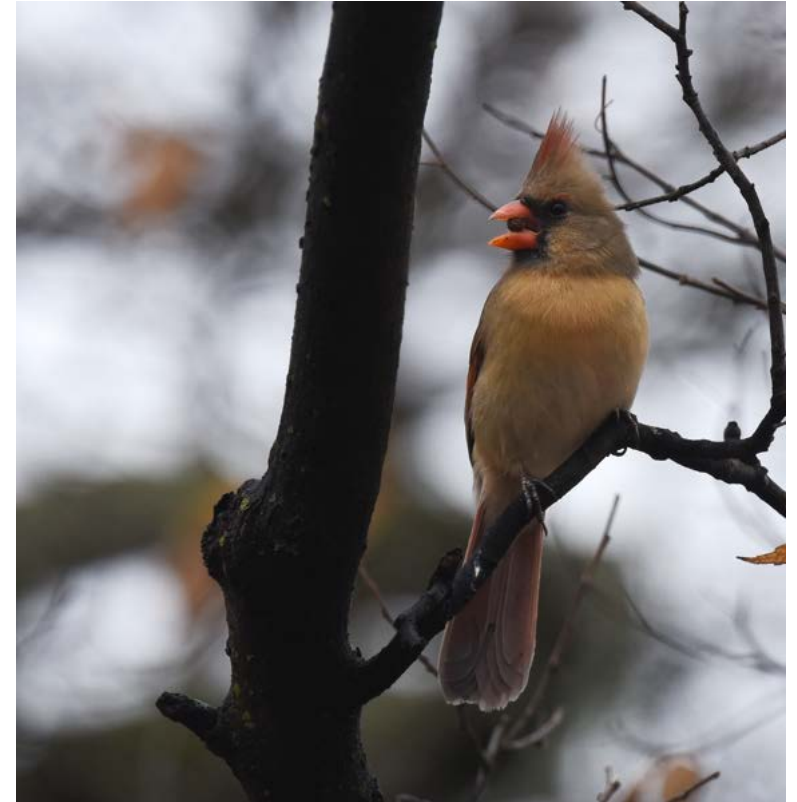
Northern Cardinal

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Male Northern Cardinal eating a sunflower seed.



Female Northern Cardinal eating a berry.

Northern Cardinal

Range

Year-round residents in their natural habitat of the Eastern United States and southern Canada, plus portions of the southwest United States, Mexico, and Central America.

(Also introduced in areas such as Hawaii, Bermuda and Los Angeles.)

Northern Cardinals do not migrate.



Map:

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Cardinal/maps-range

DuPage Birding Club, 2020

Northern Cardinal

Habitat

Common in open woodlands, particularly dense shrubby areas such as forest edges, overgrown fields, ornamental landscaping, and backyards. They move to higher open perches to sing.



Northern Cardinal on backyard fence.



Northern Cardinal in leafy vegetation.



Female Northern Cardinal singing on a perch. For most bird species, only the males sing. Northern Cardinals are an exception, with both males and females singing.

Northern Cardinal

Habitat

Northern Cardinal in open woods.



Northern Cardinal

Behavior

Northern Cardinals nest in spring in dense, woody foliage.
Males and females pair up and work together for the breeding season.
Roughly 80% of male-female pairs stay together for multiple years.



Males often feed females during courtship.

Northern Cardinal

Behavior

The female builds the nest and incubates the eggs;
the male helps collect nest material and brings food to the incubating female.
Both males and females feed the young.



Male gathering nesting material.

Northern Cardinal

Behavior

The female builds the nest and incubates the eggs;
the male helps collect nest material and brings food to the incubating female.
Both males and females feed the young.



Female on the nest.

The nest is a 4" diameter open cup made of thin rounded twigs covered by softer leaves, grapevine bark strips, roots, grasses, and pine needles.

Northern Cardinal

Behavior

After keeping to male-female pairs during breeding season, in fall and winter Northern Cardinals may travel in fairly large flocks of a dozen or several dozen birds. They sometimes forage with other species like juncos, sparrows, and goldfinches.



Small flock of male Northern Cardinals.



Northern Cardinal venturing into the water.
They bathe in all types of weather.

Northern Cardinal

in our Culture

The Northern Cardinal may be our most iconic bird.

Their brilliant red color never fails to capture our attention on their regular visits to our yards and parks.

Winter provides their most stunning setting, as reflected on countless holiday cards.

The Northern Cardinal has more state bird titles than any other bird – a total of seven states including Illinois.

Many sports teams have adopted the standout Cardinal name.



Northern Cardinals

Feeders

It is fairly easy to attract Northern Cardinals to feeders in all seasons. At feeders, they prefer safflower and sunflower seeds.



Male Northern Cardinal eating sunflower seed.



Female Northern Cardinal on winter seed feeder.

Northern Cardinal Names

Common name Northern Cardinal

Northern refers to the northernmost range of the cardinal group. Northern Cardinals are only in North America. There are no cardinals called “Southern.”

Cardinal is the name given by European colonists when they came to the continent. They were reminded of the distinctive red caps and robes of the cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church.

Prior to 1983, the Northern Cardinal was just called “Cardinal.” “Northern” distinguishes it from the two other cardinals in its genus.



Scientific name *Cardinalis cardinalis*

Cardinalis cardinalis. The genus *Cardinalis* has three species, with the prominent *cardinalis* species named for the genus; thus, the duplicated word name of *Cardinalis cardinalis*.

The *Cardinalis* genus is in the larger family similarly named *Cardinalidae*.

Cardinalis in Latin refers to the Roman Catholic cardinals.

