

# White-breasted Nuthatch

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## Appearance

The White-breasted Nuthatch is a small bird with a white face and underbody and a gray back and some black in the wings. It has a short tail and a relatively large, pointed bill. Underside of tail and flanks are a rusty-brown color. It is not likely to be confused with any other bird in DuPage County. Males have a black crown and nape, females are generally gray.



Male



Female

# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Sounds

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

### SONGS

The White-breasted Nuthatch song is a simple series of calls put together in rapid succession. Nuthatches have a rather nasal sounding call that is very distinctive.

### CALLS

The white-breasted Nuthatch is very vocal and often calls as it moves among the trees or is traveling with a mixed species flock or family group. The call is a nasal-sounding “aunk” and is a good way to ID the bird. Listen to the songs and calls at:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/White-breasted\\_Nuthatch/sounds](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/White-breasted_Nuthatch/sounds)

# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Diet

The nuthatch's diet consists of a variety of insects and plant matter. Nuthatches probe the bark and crevices of trees and shrubs looking for adult insects and larvae. They chip away at the bark and make small holes to extract any food items such as seed weevils and wood-boring insects. They also seek out and eat seeds from many woody plants such as acorns; those items making up 60-70 percent of its diet in the winter.



Nuthatch wedging food item in bark.

# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Range

Year-round resident in DuPage County



# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Habitat

The White-breasted Nuthatch is a bird of forest and woodlands but also is seen in residential neighborhoods. Nuthatches are well-adapted to wooded edges and build their nests in tree cavities often using holes made by woodpeckers. They generally are not found in open fields or treeless landscapes. They are common in most DuPage County forest preserves.



Nuthatches almost always are found in trees and are very seldom are seen on the ground.

# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Behavior

White-breasted Nuthatches are usually found moving quickly around tree trunks and branches, moving up and down the tree in search of food items.



© Jacqueline Tilles

Nuthatches often move around trees and hang upside down.



Nuthatches nest in tree cavities.

# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Behavior

Male and female nuthatches live in pairs year-round and make their nests in tree cavities where the female lays about 6 eggs and does all the brooding. The male brings food to the female. They often join mixed-species flocks with chickadees and woodpeckers at other times of year.





# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Literature/Prose



Photo: ["A White-breasted Nuthatch surprised my wife with a visit," detail from an image by fotogordo](#)

### *Winter and the Nuthatch* by Mary Oliver

Once or twice and maybe again, who knows,  
the timid nuthatch will come to me  
if I stand still, with something good to eat in my hand.  
The first time he did it  
he landed smack on his belly, as though  
the legs wouldn't cooperate. The next time  
he was bolder. Then he became absolutely  
wild about those walnuts.

But there was a morning I came late and, guess what,  
the nuthatch was flying into a stranger's hand.  
To speak plainly, I felt betrayed.  
I wanted to say: Mister,  
that nuthatch and I have a relationship.  
It took hours of standing in the snow  
before he would drop from the tree and trust my fingers.  
But I didn't say anything.  
Nobody owns the sky or the trees.  
Nobody owns the hearts of birds.  
Still, being human and partial therefore to my own  
successes—  
though not resentful of others fashioning theirs—

I'll come tomorrow, I believe, quite early.

# White-breasted Nuthatch

## Feeders

Nuthatches are regular feeder birds where they can easily be attracted by sunflower seeds and peanuts. They often take one seed at a time and bring it to a tree to cache it for later use, or to wedge it in the bark to break open the item for easier consumption.



# White-breasted Nuthatch Names

## Common Name White-breasted Nuthatch

*White-breasted* – A primary feature is white breast and underparts.

*Nuthatch* – From Middle English word *hatch* that meant “hack,” as in hacking with a knife or hatchet. Based on the behavior to hack or crack open nuts with its bill.



## Scientific Name *Sitta carolinensis*

*Sitta* – From Greek *sitte* meaning “bird like a woodpecker.”

*carolinensis* – Of the Carolina colonies in the southeast U.S.

