

reportedly poor this year up in the boreal forest so they may be moving south. When they do irrupt south they are equally at home at feeder stations, competing effectively with goldfinches and siskins. Interestingly, one study conducted in Massachusetts suggested redpolls actually prefer millet seeds, something to keep in mind when stocking your winter feeders if you're getting redpolls.

How both redpoll species survive and prosper in the harsh Arctic winters is truly amazing. One of their adaptive features: They store seeds in laterally expandable sections of their esophagus (aka, diverticula). When it's very cold, they gather seeds quickly while in the open, storing them in the diverticula, retreat to a sheltered area, regurgitate, husk, and consume the seeds. Redpolls can store up to 25 percent of their daily cold weather energy needs in this manner.

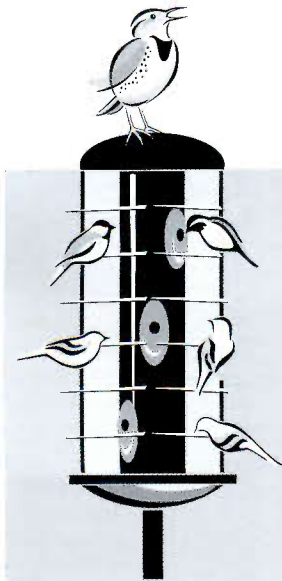
White-winged Crossbills have overlapping breeding ranges with the redpolls, but don't go quite as far north; Red Crossbills are much more widespread, also breeding in Western USA's coniferous forests, clear down to the conifers in the mountains in Mexico. Neither are traditional feeder



*Will White-winged Crossbills show up at your Illinois feeder this winter? Photo taken in Highland Park, Lake County by Richard Ettlinger several years ago.*

birds since their bill shape is designed to extract the seeds from pine cones and other conifers. But they will utilize feeders on some occasions. Karen and I have a poor but memorable (to us) photo of a male Red Crossbill eating sunflower seed on our platform feeder, taken 14 March 1970. Both crossbills are consummate nomads, always to be found where the cone crop is good. This winter, forecasts suggest Red Crossbills may stay north because of the abundant white pine cone crop (their preferred seed source). If the white or red cedars, or hemlocks in your yard (or a nearby park or preserve) have lots of cones, you should keep an eye out for White-wings; the spruce cones they prefer are pretty sparse this year up north, and they may be headed south.

Check your local conifer stands, and stock your feeders. This could be the year when Evening Grosbeaks return, or redpolls or White-winged Crossbills invade in numbers. Heck, the last invasion of Pine Grosbeaks into Illinois was 1978 – maybe they irrupt on a 30-year cycle? Or how about one of those three Colorado rosy-finch species getting blown just a bit off course on their way to New Mexico for the winter. Now that's really dreaming in Technicolor! Still, it could happen!



*Artwork by Jenny Vogt.*

## Yard Birds

I'd welcome your feedback on this column, as it may become a regular feature in the Meadowlark. I'd especially like your yard and feeder bird stories and observations, which we can build into future columns. The editor and I both hope we can make this column a place where IOS members who enjoy backyard birding can share their experiences. Send me your observations, interesting visitors and the like. That's why the column subtitle is: Reflections on backyard birding throughout Illinois.

You can reach me at: [bfisher928@aol.com](mailto:bfisher928@aol.com) or by phone at 630-985-2956. Tell me your story and I'll write it down. I look forward to hearing from you.

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