

# IRRUPTIVE NUTHATCHES

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the fenced backyard of her home on Avenue in Reston, Manitoba, Pearl Granger, enjoys watching birds at her feeder, which is set close to the house and a large maple tree. Common Redpolls, a White-breasted Nuthatch, a Downy Woodpecker and House Sparrows regularly use the feeder, loaded with black sunflower seeds.

During the afternoon of 26 January, Granger happened to glance out the back and saw a surprising and somewhat unfamiliar sight. Ten or 11 not so familiar birds were clearly visible in the maple tree, on the feeder, or on the ground when redpolls or sparrows were visiting the feeder.

Something familiar about the visitors alerted her. She quickly noticed they were smaller than House Sparrows and had a shape and features similar to those of a White-breasted Nuthatch. What became apparent, however, was that the birds clearly displayed a black line through the eye and a white eyebrow and a reddish breast. Referring to her Peterson's *Field guide to western birds*, Granger searched for the bird that resembled those outside and concluded they were Red-breasted Nuthatches.<sup>1</sup>

Two days later that Granger reported the details and that the visiting nuthatches had left her yard by morning of 29 January.

Little checking revealed that this species is common amongst northern migrants and migrates irregularly.<sup>2</sup> They are irruptive migrants, that is, they experience sudden upsurges of population, and numbers and winter range vary

Granger's sighting suggests this may be the year of a major migration of Red-breasted Nuthatches and that the flock she saw was an example of a minor irruption of these migrants.

Most unfortunate was the overnight disappearance of these birds, thereby preventing possible witnesses from providing unarguable confirmation of the sighting.

- <sup>1</sup> PETERSON, R.T. 1983. *Field guide to western birds*.
- <sup>2</sup> ROBBINS, C.S., B. BRUUN and H.S. ZIM. 1983. *A guide to field identification. Birds of North America*. Golden Press, N.Y. 360 pp.
- <sup>3</sup> SCOTT, S.L., Ed. 1987. *Field guide to the birds of North America*. National Geographic Society, Washington. 464 pp.



Red-breasted Nuthatch Fred Lahrman