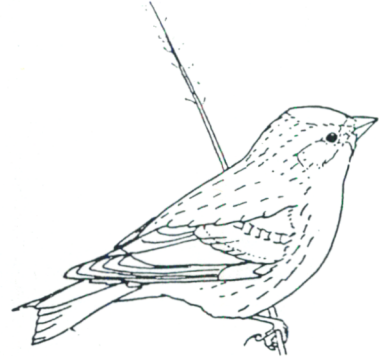


A lot of you I'm sure were getting redpolls at your feeders this winter. For your information, here are a few quotes about this welcome addition to our usual winter flocks of chickadees and other birds.

Quoting from Peter Whelan's column in the Toronto Globe and Mail of January 29th: "Fittingly in the cold, redpolls irrupting from the Arctic are the birds of this winter. They flocked to feeders across most of southern Canada. These pink-breasted angel-faced cuties proved tough. They were seen driving goldfinches off the little black niger seeds that both relish and driving the chickadees off suet feeders. In my Toronto back yard one Common Redpoll squeezed a circle of respect around itself on a feeding shelf from eight larger House Finches. Any finch venturing close was driven back with a gape-billed threat.

Redpolls suddenly blanketed the feeders of Moncton, N.B., '100 to 200 on any offering niger seed,' Jim Edsell said. 'It is about the date here when they finish off the natural food and move into feeders.'

At -30 in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, resourceful redpolls had their morning feed at Bob Luterbach's feeder, then sheltered by diving head-first into 20 centimetres of snow on a south-facing slope. 'They stayed there maybe half an hour, some with their tails and backs showing, then came out.' Last winter, he saw redpolls dive into snow banks for the night in another local yard."



*The Birders Handbook* by Ehrlich, Dobkin and Wheye has an article on Winter Feeding by redpolls and crossbills which I am quoting in part: "One of the most important adaptations enabling redpolls and crossbills to cope with the energy demands imposed by severe arctic and subarctic winters is a structure that is somewhat analogous to the substantial crop of gallinaceous birds. The structure is a partially bilobed pocket situated about midway down the neck, technically an 'esophageal diverticulum.' The pocket is used to store seeds, especially toward nightfall and during particularly severe weather. The 'extra' food helps carry the bird through low nighttime temperatures and permits energy to be saved during bad weather by reducing foraging time and allowing the bird to 'feed' while resting in a sheltered spot.

Redpolls appear to be able to survive colder temperatures than any other songbirds that have been studied in detail. Large birds, of course, have a great advantage in saving heat because they have a relatively small surface area for their volume. Birds as large as ptarmigans and as small as snow buntings may borrow into loose snow to sleep. Two feet down in the snow the temperature can be 25°F