

(Gary P. Carter)



Sittidae the NUTHATCHES

The Nuthatch family is a conglomeration of mostly non-migratory birds scattered around the globe. No one is yet clear on the number of distinct species in this family. Nuthatches tend to be solitary and arboreal, and they are primarily insect and seed eaters. They are usually stocky birds with big heads and short tails. They are well known for appearing to defy gravity as they climb headfirst down the trunk of a tree while woodpeckers only climb upward, but actually nuthatches do both. Nuthatches lack the stiff tail feathers that woodpeckers and creepers have to help support and stabilize them while they forage for food. They normally feed by spiraling down the trunk of a tree from top to bottom and then moving to the next tree. In this way, they glean insects the woodpeckers have left behind.

“The busy nuthatch climbs down his tree, around the great whole spirally; peeping into wrinkles gray, under ruffled lichens gay.” —*The Chronicle*, Albemarle, NC, April 12, 1915

There are four species of nuthatches found in North America. Three of these are found in the Carolinas. One of these, the Red-breasted Nuthatch, is an unpredictable migratory species. The other two, the White-breasted and Brown-headed nuthatches, breed throughout the region. In the winter, all three of our nuthatches can be attracted to backyard feeders with suet.