



A most conspicuous bird is the male Northern Cardinal! His red plumage is not to be mistaken, accented as it is with his black face and powerful red-orange beak.

The female Cardinal wears more demure plumage: basic camel brown accented by red on her crest, wings, and tail. She also has the powerful beak to open seeds and nuts as well as bite off twigs for her nest.





A flick of the cardinal's wing reveals that he is not all red. Gray feathers along his body show up in this photo taken one day in May.

Once mated, the cardinal pair remain loyal for life. She constructs their nest and broods the eggs and young, while he feeds her and the nestlings, even caring for the fledglings as she builds a second nest.



Of course, the female Northern Cardinal is quite capable of feeding herself and her young.

The male cardinal is a virtuoso singer with a vast repertoire of songs to impress a would-be mate or to declare his territory.



The most endearing interaction between cardinals is mate-feeding. Here a male approaches his mate with a nut in his beak.



The birds exchange the piece of nut looking as if they are kissing.





Their bond is strengthened as the female cardinal takes the nut in her beak. The male looks on approvingly.

The fledgling of a cardinal pair is mostly brown as it was in the nest, yet its future red coloring is just appearing. Note that its beak is black. This fledgling's crest and wings still need to grow a bit.



Still a fledgling although a bit more developed structurally, this young cardinal shows only a tinge of red in its feathers. The black of its beak is fading.

An older juvenile forages for seeds with her mother. The younger bird is almost the same size as its parent, but she still has a black beak and her crest will be bigger.

Yes, she's a young female.

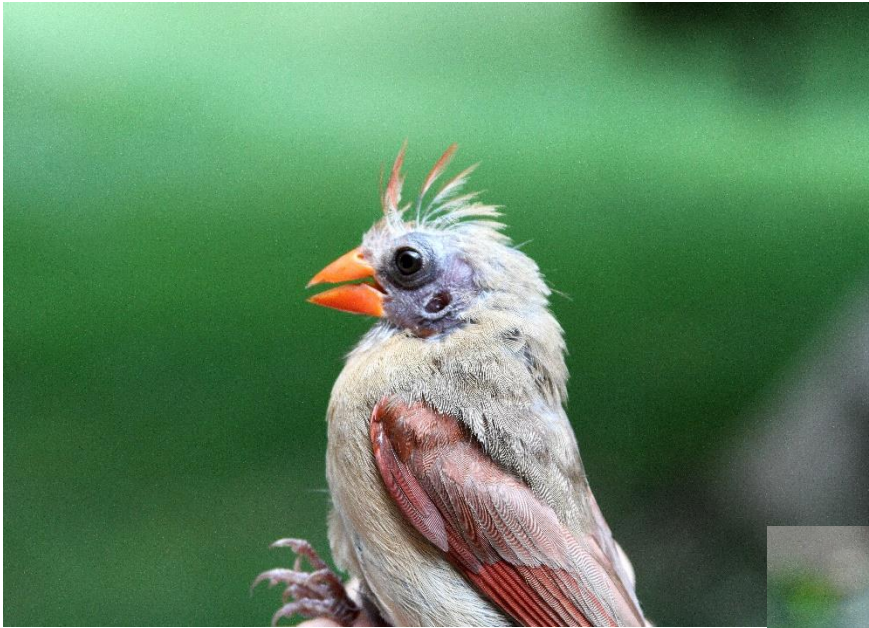


Male cardinals often become 'single parents' for their offspring when the females go off to build another nest.

Here a male is sunning with his progeny on a lazy, warm day.

In late August this male Northern Cardinal is sunning as its feathers begin to molt. Its crest is rather disheveled.





A female cardinal being held by a bird bander shows molting around her head with feathers missing from her face and her crest looking like a punk rocker hairdo. Note exposed ear.

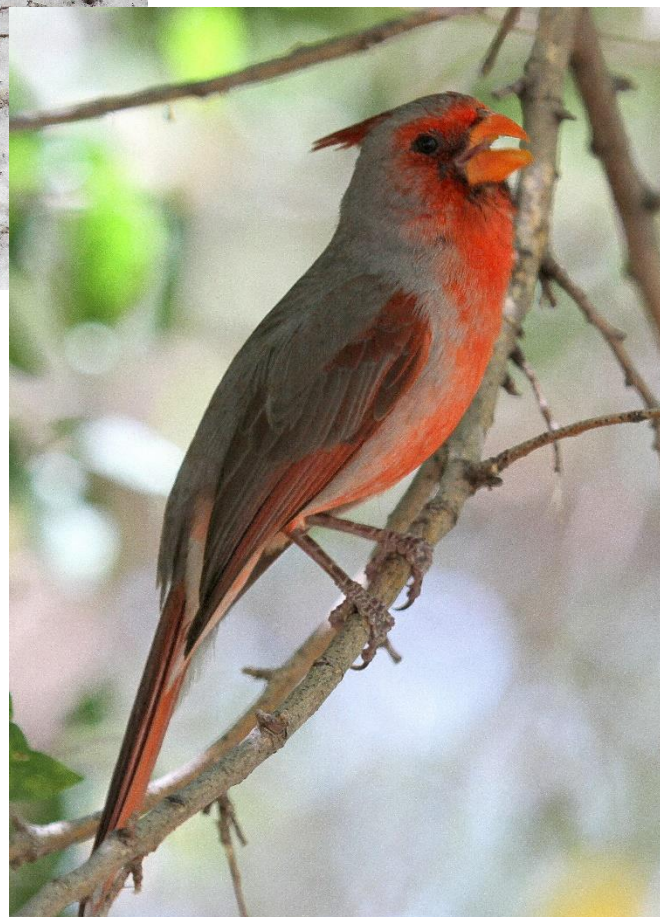
The pain of being a bird bander. Bob Mulvihill's finger was latched onto by a different female cardinal that also showed a degree of molting.



This female cardinal was not molting. She was leucistic with some red in the “right” areas, a colored eye and beak, but mostly white feathers with splotches of brown.

With the help of feeders and adaptations, the formerly southern redbird has found it possible to survive the winters of the northern U.S.A.

(The cardinal on the right is puffed up against the cold.)



The cardinal has also moved into the arid regions of the Southwest, previously only inhabited by the Pyrrhuloxia. Note the color differences of the two species.

References

Arthur A. Allen. "Random Notes on Tanagers and Finches." *The Book of Birds; The First Work Presenting in Full Color All the Major Species of the United States and Canada, Vol. II*. Gilbert Grosvenor and Alexander Wetmore, editors. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1932-1939. Page 248.

Paul J. Baicich and Colin J. O. Harrison. "Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)."
Nests, Eggs and Nestlings of North American Birds (Princeton Field Guides). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Pages 290-291.

Marcia Bonta. "Christmas Birds; Northern Cardinals brighten even the dreariest winter days." *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Vol. 31, No. 2 (November/December 2008). Pages 30-37.

Erik Bruhnke. "Northern Cardinal: Rhapsody in Red." *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Vol. 41, No. 3 (January/February 2019). Pages 26-34.

John V. Dennis. "Southern Species Extended Their Breeding Ranges Northward." and "Cardinal." *A Complete Guide to Bird Feeding*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. Pages 107-108 & 120-122.

Mary Dykstra. "Northern Cardinal; The Red Bird of Happiness." *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Vol. 24, No. 3 (January/February 2002). Pages 32-40.

Kit and George Harrison. "Bergmann's Rule" and "Chapter 9: The Big Finches." *The Birds of Winter*. New York: Random House, 1990. Pages 12-13 & 106-114.

Donald Kroodsman. "The Northern Cardinal." *The Singing Life of Birds; The Art and Science of Listening to Birdsong*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. Pages 357-365.

Mary Leister. "Cardinals by the Pair." *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Vol. 18, No. 2 {November/December 1995}. Pages 40-47.

Laura C. Martin. "Northern Cardinal." *The Folklore of Birds*. Old Saybrook, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 1993. Pages 23-24.

Gary Ritchison. *Northern Cardinal* (Wild Bird Guides). Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1997.

Donald and Lillian Stokes. "Northern Cardinal / *Cardinalis cardinalis*." *A Guide to Bird Behavior; Volume II* (Stokes Nature Guides). Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983. Pages 247-257.

Julie Zickefoose. "Northern Cardinal; Stoking the Red Fire." *The Bluebird Effect, Uncommon Bonds with Common Birds*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012. Pages 295-308.