

# Nature Notes

## The Oregon Junco (*Junco hyemalis*)



As spring approaches the first little Dark-eyed or Oregon Juncos will appear, scratching away at the snow looking for seeds that have been buried by the winter winds. Usually it is the darker headed males who show up first, followed later by the females.

These busy little birds spend a lot of their time feeding on the ground, looking for the seeds and small fruits that make up the bulk of their winter diet. In late spring they include insects as 50% of their diet in order to feed the young sufficient protein.

Juncos are territorial and the males select high vantage points



*Photo of Male Junco by Johnson Mills B&B*

from which to sing a musical trill to defend their territories. If a female deems the territory suitable, a nest will be built. Juncos seldom stray far from the ground for nesting, seeking out sites protected by clumps of weeds, low brush, or a fallen log. We even had one Junco pair successfully fledge a brood in the hanging basket by our back door despite the 6:00am shower every day from the drip irrigation head.

The female will incubate the 3 to 5 eggs on her own for 11 to 13 days but the male joins in feeding the young and in carrying off the fecal sacs for disposal away from the nest. The young birds will leave the nest when they are between 9 and 11 days old and then become members of the flock.

Flocks have a well-established hierarchy with males dominant over females and mature birds dominating younger birds. The white tail feathers are used as a display both to warn the flock of danger and in disputes with other Juncos.

By late fall, most of the birds will have migrated south, spending the winter as a flock in the Western United States. But come they will be next spring they will be back!



*Photo of Junco Nestlings by  
Marci Glenn*

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