

BIRDMAN

Bird cousins return in winter

BY TED A. GLOVER

As the winter months approach and we've said goodbye to our summer visitors, we can look forward to many more of our local birds as their cousins return to the milder climate of the Applegate. Although many of the birds we see daily are local, we see a lot more of them this time of year. Many have returned from the northern reaches of Canada and Alaska, and others have simply come down from the higher elevations that surround our valleys.

As you drive the Applegate Valley and observe the visitors to your yards, you may notice an increase in the numbers of smaller birds such as the Dark-eyed Junco, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Black-capped Chickadee. Many of these birds are

returning to the lower elevations of the valleys in search of food. Food, of course, is one of the primary motivators for the wandering habits of the birds.

A couple of species of sparrows increase in numbers during our wintertime. The White-crowned Sparrow and its close cousin the Golden-crowned Sparrow are very abundant this time of year. Look for both of them along roadside brush and also in your gardens and in public parks. Both species are very common now and are seen in large groups of 10 to 20 birds often staying in one area for several weeks. The White-crowned adult is noticeable for its distinctive white markings on its head and a whitish throat patch. The Golden-

crowned has a central golden-colored crown stripe over a black top. But be aware of the first-year juveniles that have returned with their parents. The young of both species are similar and lack the bold markings of the adult birds.

Because of the abundance of small birds, keep your eyes out for the wild-eyed and swift "bird-killer" of the forests and fields. This crow-sized hunter, the Cooper's Hawk, has a very long rounded tail and short rounded wings and likes to frequent bird feeders in search of prey, which can include everything from sparrows to the large Ruffed Grouse.

Another bird that seems to be more visible now is the California Quail. This plump bird is slightly smaller than the plentiful Mourning Dove and is distinguished by its overall darker color, strongly scaled belly, and a prominent

plume on its forehead, just above a dark, black face. The female is similar in appearance to the male, but has a grayer face and smaller plume. You can spot these birds usually in large coveys of 20 to 40, scratching on the ground for grasses, grain and insects. The California Quail rarely flies—it prefers to run away.

So have fun for the next few months observing our wintertime friends and see just how many species you can spot. If you have bird feeders, don't forget to include suet, a popular winter treat for many birds including woodpeckers.

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Black-capped Chickadees, tame and inquisitive, spend the winter making the rounds of feeders in the neighborhood.



White-crowned Sparrows, one of the most common winter sparrows, raise their crown feathers when agitated.



Gold-rush miners took comfort in the melancholy song of the **Golden-crowned Sparrow**.



The overall population of the highly sedentary **California Quail** has been declining since 1960.

Stunning beautyberries: An elegant and useful shrub

BY JEN TIETJEN

Striking and unusual, beautyberry bushes are adorned all fall and into winter with violet berry clusters. The botanical name of this wonderful plant is *Callicarpa*. There are many species from around the world ranging from the American South to China and Japan. Although most of us are only familiar with the purple-fruited varieties, there are also white and shell pink cultivars.

Beautyberry was long used as a folk medicine for the prevention of mosquito bites, modern research shows this practice had much wisdom to it. Researchers for the US Department of Agriculture have found chemical components in the leaves that may well turn out to be as effective in deterring ticks and fire ants as DEET, the most common active ingredient in insect repellents. One of the most important pest-repellent chemicals that researchers have isolated is callicarpenal. Besides repelling pests, *Callicarpa* has also been used in the treatment of colic, malaria, dysentery rheumatism, fever and cancer.

The berries are a choice food source for birds in fall. Mostly overlooked by humans, beautyberry has been used in winemaking and makes a fine jelly. If you are up for trying the jelly, here is a recipe:

Cover 1-½ quarts of berries (make sure they are free of leaves and branches) with two quarts of water and boil for 20 minutes. Strain the infusion.

Take three cups of the infusion and mix with one envelope of Sure-jell (pectin) and four cups of sugar. Boil and skim off any foam.

Pour into jelly jars with two-part caps and boil in water bath for ten minutes.

Beautyberry jelly would make a great



Make beautyberry jelly for holiday gifts.
Top photo: *Callicarpa Americana*.
Bottom photo: *Callicarpa Welsh's Pink*.

and unique holiday gift!

If you are looking for the perfect shrub to fill out your garden, look no further than beautybush. With its pink flowers in spring, yellow fall color, vibrant fall berries, and many uses, *Callicarpa* truly deserves a spot in every yard.

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PHOTO CREDIT

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