



Did You Know?

If you see or think you see an American dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) in the field, wait a moment for it to blink. When it does, this intriguing little bird's eyes flash white thanks to tiny feathers on the skin of its eyelids. Biologists think this feature may help other wildlife better identify this relatively nondescript bird in its noisy streamside environment, or it could be used for communication in courtship, but as with many things in the natural world, science doesn't know for sure.

As North America's only truly aquatic songbird, the American dipper takes its name from the bobbing motion it makes as it catches all of its food underwater. Over the years, it has developed other unusual physical characteristics that allow it to dive, swim, and navigate the beds of fast-flowing streams along the western portion of North America. Its eyelids also feature nictating membranes that allow it to see underwater, and its nostrils have nasal flaps that close automatically when a dipper puts its face in the water and turns upstream. Also, extra hemoglobin creates more oxygen in a dipper's blood, allowing it to stay underwater for 30 seconds or more.

Naturalist John Muir found particular charm in the American dipper, writing, "Among all the mountain birds, none has cheered me so much in my lonely wanderings, — none so unfailingly. For both in winter and summer he sings, sweetly, cheerily, independent alike of sunshine and of love, requiring no other inspiration than the stream on which he dwells." 🐦

— Danielle Taylor