



DO YOU KNOW.....SOME FACTS ABOUT BIRDS

By Chris Montuori

The colors of bird feathers are not always what they seem! The red of a Northern cardinal is truly red, caused by pigmentation. The blue of a blue jay or bluebird, however, is not really there. The apparent color is produced the same way a prism produces the spectrum. If viewed with the feather between a light source and the observer, the blue disappears. Similarly, in dim lighting, the feathers may appear more slate-grey than blue. I also understand that, if you wet a blue feather, the light refraction is disrupted and the feather will be clear or white. Next time you find one, give it a try!



In the direct light of the camera flash, these fledgling Eastern bluebirds appear very blue indeed.

Why don't birds' feet freeze during the winter? There are several fascinating adaptations that help prevent frozen tootsies in birds. For one reason, the arteries (moving blood from the warm body) and the veins (moving blood from the cold extremities) lay side by side. The arterial blood warms the venous blood somewhat before it reaches the body's core. Similarly, the arterial blood is cooled before it reaches the toes to reduce heat loss to the body. In addition to that special adaptation, we have all seen birds that, on first glance, appear to be missing a leg. In fact, the leg is tucked neatly into the warm, insulating feathers of the belly. That reduces the heat loss from the body by half. And, when it is really cold, the bird can sit, covering both feet.

If that is not enough, birds can even constrict the blood vessels in the feet to further reduce heat loss. While the body temperature of a duck standing on ice may be a toasty 104 degrees, its feet may be just slightly above freezing. Pretty neat trick!

