Peg Howard's Birding Club Cookbook

Recipes Inspired by the Empty-Nesters Cozy Mystery Series



by Jen Dodrill

Hello, friend!
I'm Peg Howard, founder of the empty-nesters birding group, accidental sleuth, and enthusiastic supporter of coffee.
Our birding adventures have taken us from Fort Barrancas to Fort Pickens and into more mysteries than I care to count. Along the way, I've shared plenty of meals with friends, family, and fellow birdwatchers.
Some of these recipes come from my kitchen. Others belong to my mother-in-law, Hazel, who believes every problem looks a little smaller after a good meal and a slice of dessert.
I hope these recipes bring a little sunshine, friendship, and Gulf Coast charm to your table.
Happy birding!
— Peg



Breakfast with Peg & Hazel

Blue Heron Blueberry Scones
From Peg's Recipe Box

"Birding tip: Arrive early. The birds—and the coffee—are best before the crowds arrive."

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2/3 cup whole milk
- 2 eggs, beaten, divided
- 1 dash vanilla extract
- 1 cup frozen blueberries
- 2 tablespoons white sugar



1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Mix flour, 1/2 cup white sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in a bowl.
3. Cut in butter using a pastry blender or fork until the flour mixture looks like cornmeal.
4. Pour in milk, 1 egg, and vanilla extract. Fold in frozen blueberries and mix sparingly.
5. Scoop dough onto the prepared baking sheet into 10 equal-sized amounts of dough. Do not flatten. Brush tops with reserved beaten egg. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons sugar evenly over the tops.
6. Bake in the preheated oven until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.

Cardinal Cranberry Muffins

From Hazel's Recipe Box

"Hazel always said cranberries and oranges brightened even the cloudiest day."



- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup white sugar or more to taste (up to 1/2 cup for sweeter muffins)
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1 cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- 1 ½ cups fresh cranberries

1. Gather all ingredients. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Line a 12-cup muffin pan with paper liners.
2. Sift flour, baking powder, and salt into a bowl.
3. Beat sugar and vegetable oil in a large bowl with an electric mixer until light in color and well blended, about 3 minutes. Add egg and beat until smooth. Mix in orange juice and zest.
4. Add flour mixture in batches, stirring until just combined. Fold in cranberries.
5. Spoon batter into the prepared muffin cups, filling each 2/3 full.
6. Bake in the preheated oven until tops are golden, and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 20 to 25 minutes. Cool muffins in the pan briefly before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

Pelican Perch Coffee Cake

From Hazel's Recipe Box

"This coffee cake disappeared faster than a rare bird sighting announcement."

- 2 teaspoons unsalted butter

Dry Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt

Crumble Mixture:

- 1 ½ cups finely chopped toasted walnuts
- ⅓ cup packed sugar - light or dark
- ⅓ cup white sugar
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Wet Ingredients:

- 1 cup white sugar
- ½ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2 large eggs, divided
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 Honeycrisp or Granny Smith apples



1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) with a rack in the center position. Generously butter a 9x12-inch baking dish with 2 teaspoons butter.
2. Whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and ½ teaspoon sea salt in a bowl; set the dry ingredients aside.
3. Combine walnuts, ⅓ cup brown sugar, ⅓ cup white sugar, 3 tablespoons melted butter, cinnamon, and ¼ teaspoon salt in a bowl until walnuts and sugars are thoroughly coated with butter; set crumble mixture aside. (cont. to nex page)

4. Beat 1 cup white sugar and ½ cup butter together in a separate bowl with a spatula until well blended.
5. Whisk in 1 egg until mixture is smooth, 2 to 3 minutes.
6. Whisk in the second egg until thoroughly incorporated. Add yogurt and vanilla; whisk together.
7. Add the flour mixture to the yogurt mixture; whisk just until the flour disappears. Do not overmix.
8. Remove and discard cores from apples. Cut apples into ⅛- to ¼-inch slices. Be sure to cut them small enough. Stack a few slices; cut down the center, lengthwise, then dice, crosswise, into cubes.
9. Fold apples into the cake batter with a spatula until just combined.
10. Spread ½ the batter into the prepared baking dish; evenly scatter ½ crumble mixture over top.
11. Dollop the remaining ½ of the batter on top of the crumble mixture; spread carefully to distribute evenly, trying not to disturb the crumbs.
12. Bake in the center of the preheated oven until a toothpick or bamboo skewer inserted into the center comes out clean, about 40 minutes.
13. Cool to room temperature before slicing and serving, about 30 minutes.



Birdwatching Snacks

"The perfect snacks to tuck into your birding bag."

Peanut-free Trail Mix

- Pretzel twists
- Dried cranberries
- Sunflower seeds
- Pumpkin seeds
- White chocolate chips
- Raisins



Tropical Bird Fruit Salsa

- Mango
- Pineapple
- Strawberries
- Lime juice
- Serve with cinnamon sugar chips.

Bird Nest Pretzel Bites

- 6 (1 ounce) squares white chocolate
- 1 (15 ounce) package mini twist pretzels

1. Place white chocolate into the top of a double boiler over simmering water. Stir frequently, scraping down the sides with a rubber spatula to avoid scorching, until melted, about 5 minutes.
2. Dip pretzels into melted chocolate to completely cover half of each one, then place onto waxed paper.
3. Refrigerate for 15 minutes to harden.

Lunches & Potluck Favorites Ft. Pickens Pasta Salad

From Peg's Recipe Box

"This pasta salad has made an appearance at more bird club gatherings than I can count."

- 1 pound tri-colored spiral pasta
- 1 (16 ounce) bottle Italian-style salad dressing
- 6 tablespoons salad seasoning mix
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ yellow bell pepper, chopped
- 1 (2.25 ounce) can black olives, chopped

1. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook pasta in the boiling water, stirring occasionally, until tender yet firm to the bite, about 10 to 12 minutes; rinse under cold water and drain.
2. Whisk Italian dressing and salad spice mix together until smooth. Combine pasta, tomatoes, bell peppers, and olives in a salad bowl.
3. Pour dressing over salad and mix well.
4. For the best flavor, refrigerate the pasta salad for 8 hours to overnight.



Murder Most Fowl Chicken Salad

From Hazel's Recipe Box

"A family favorite that always disappears quickly."

- 2 (3 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
- ⅓ cup creamy salad dressing or mayo
- 1 (8 ounce) can pineapple tidbits, juice reserved
- 3 (5 ounce) cans chunk chicken, drained
- 1 cup blanched slivered almonds
- 1 ½ cups seedless grapes, halved

1. Beat cream cheese in a medium bowl until fluffy. Mix in salad dressing and 2 tablespoons of reserved pineapple juice.
2. Stir in pineapple tidbits, chicken, almonds, and grapes until evenly coated.
3. Chill in the refrigerator until serving.



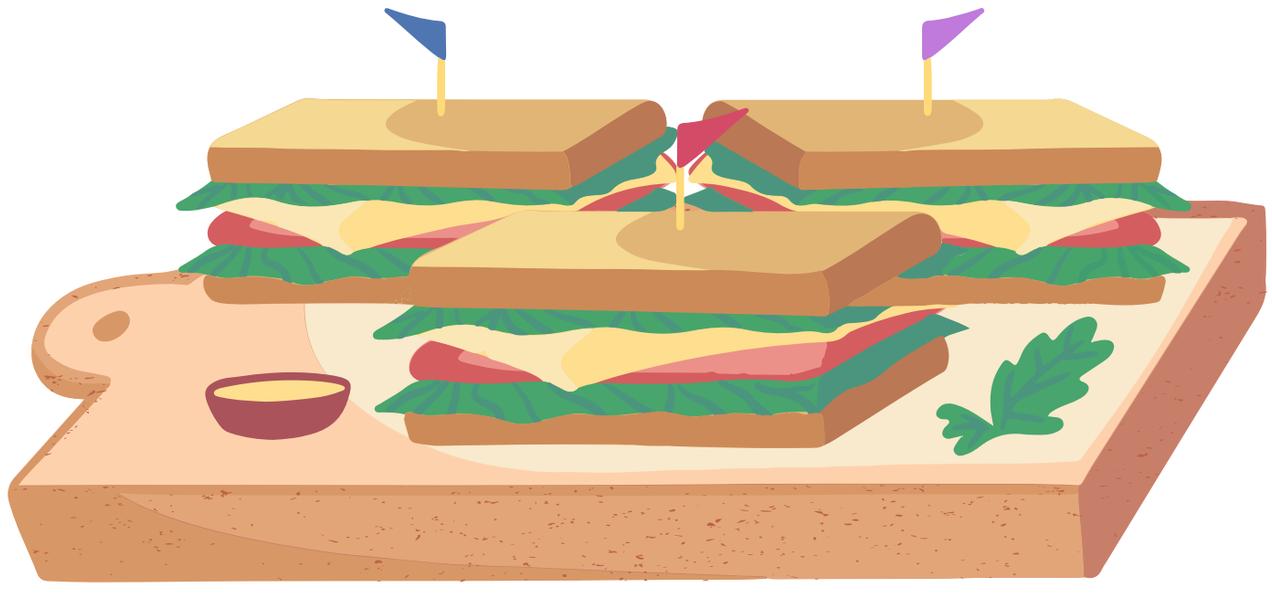
Pelican Pier Pimento Cheese

From Hazel's Recipe Box

"No Southern gathering is complete without pimento cheese."

- 2 cups shredded extra-sharp Cheddar cheese
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 (4 ounce) jar diced pimento, drained
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced (Optional)
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper (Optional)
- ¼ teaspoon onion powder
- salt and black pepper to taste

1. Place Cheddar cheese, cream cheese, mayonnaise, pimento, minced jalapeño, garlic powder, cayenne pepper, and onion powder in a large bowl.
2. Mix until thoroughly combined and season to taste with salt and pepper.



Sweet Endings

Quetzal Key Lime Pie

From Peg's Recipe Box

"A tropical treat inspired by the colorful bird that started one of my adventures."

- 1 (10 inch) prepared graham cracker pie crust
- 1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- ½ cup key lime juice
- 1 (16 ounce) package frozen whipped topping, thawed

1. In a large bowl, mix together condensed milk and lime juice.
2. Fold in whipped topping and mix until smooth.
3. Pour mixture into graham cracker crust. Refrigerate at least 1 hour before serving.
4. Enjoy!



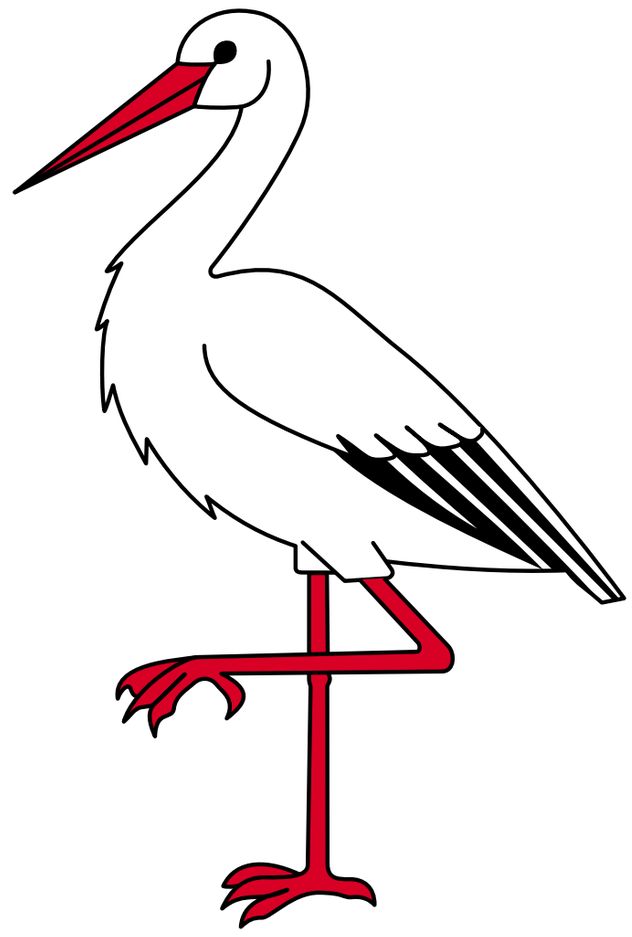
No Egrets Coconut Macaroons

From Hazel's Recipe Box

"The only thing you'll regret is not making a double batch."

- 5 ½ cups sweetened flaked coconut
- ⅔ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Line baking sheets with parchment paper or aluminum foil.
2. Combine coconut, flour, and salt in a large bowl; stir in sweetened condensed milk and vanilla extract until mixture is evenly blended. Use your hands if needed to combine thoroughly.
3. Drop coconut mixture onto the prepared baking sheets, about 1 inch apart, using a small ice cream scoop.
4. Bake in the preheated oven until tops are golden and lightly toasted, 12 to 15 minutes.
5. Cool for 5 minutes



Hummingbird Cupcakes

From Peg's Recipe Box

"Sweet, cheerful, and perfect for celebrating good friends."

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups white sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 2 cups mashed bananas
- 1 (8 ounce) can crushed pineapple
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract

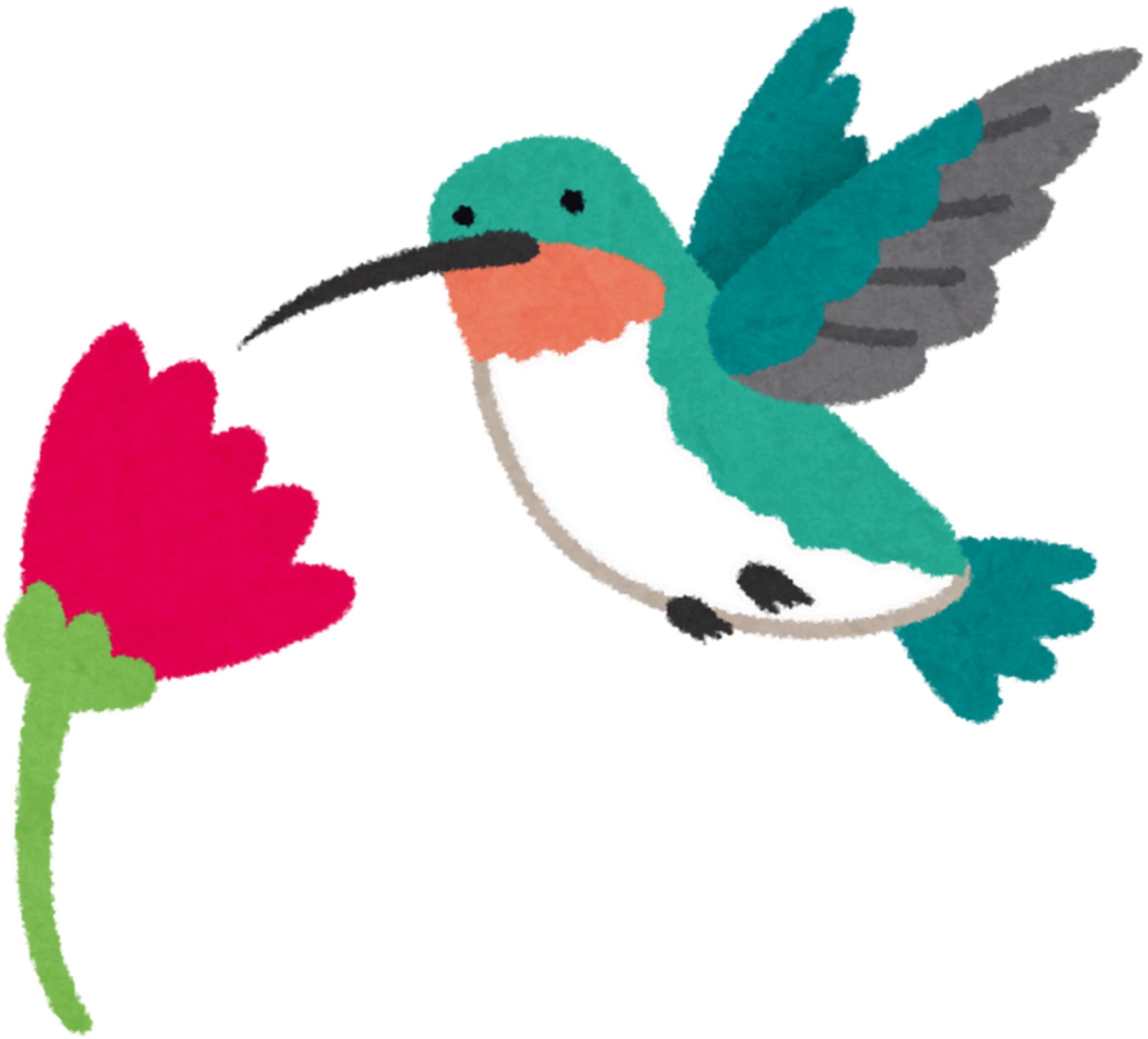


Frosting:

- 1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 (16 ounce) package powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease and flour 3 regular cupcake pans.
2. Combine flour, sugar, salt, baking soda, and cinnamon in a large bowl. Add eggs and oil, stirring until dry ingredients are moistened. (continued next page)

3. Stir in bananas, pineapple, pecans, and vanilla extract. Pour batter into the pans, filling cups about 1/2 full.
4. Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cupcake comes out clean, about 25 minutes.
5. Transfer pans to a wire rack and cool for 10 minutes. Remove cupcakes from pans and let cool completely, at least 20 minutes.
6. Beat cream cheese and butter together using an electric mixer until creamy. Add powdered sugar gradually, beating until light and fluffy. Stir in vanilla extract.
7. Frost the cooled cupcakes.



The Empty-nesters Cozy Mystery Series

A clean, humorous cozy mystery series featuring a sharp-witted amateur sleuth, small-town secrets, and birding adventures gone wrong.

When widow Peg Howard starts a birding group in Pensacola to cope with empty-nest syndrome, she doesn't expect to find herself solving murders. But with a keen eye for detail and plenty of time on her hands, Peg keeps uncovering clues others miss—and landing in the middle of dangerous investigations.

Set in Northwest Florida, with scenes at Fort Barrancas and Fort Pickens, this 3-book cozy mystery series delivers quirky characters, loyal friendships, and light humor—without graphic violence or romance.



Perfect for fans of:

- Cozy mysteries
- Amateur sleuths
- Women's fiction with mystery
- Small-town secrets
- Clean, no-spice reads

Midlife is full of surprises... and some of them are deadly.

Learn more about The Empty-nesters Cozy Mystery series here:

About the Author

Jen Dodrill brings inspiration and hope to life through the pages of her books, telling heartfelt stories that shine in both good and challenging times. A mother of five and a proud grandma, she writes cozy mysteries, romantic suspense, and women's fiction—fueled by her love of reading and all things coffee.

Learn more at jendodrillwrites.com.
Connect with Jen on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest @jendodrillwrites.

