

## BIRD AND OTHER WILDLIFE FEEDERS



Wildlife can not exist without the four components that comprise their habitat: food, water, shelter, and space. Your property may not be large enough to provide all of the habitat needs for the kind of wildlife you wish to attract. However, you can offer one or more of these habitat components, even in a small backyard environment. Providing a variety of feeding stations will give wildlife, both residential and migratory, added incentive to visit your property. The more habitat components you provide, the more wildlife species you will likely attract. Wildlife feeders provide a supplement to the natural foods already available from nearby trees, shrubs, and flowers. Therefore, planting trees, shrubs, grasses, wildflowers, and groundcovers will increase the chances that wildlife will frequent your yard. For example, a bird feeder that is next to a sheltering evergreen shrub will attract more species than one that is not. This chapter explains how to provide feeding stations for wildlife in your backyard. For information on providing cover for wildlife in your backyard



cardinal

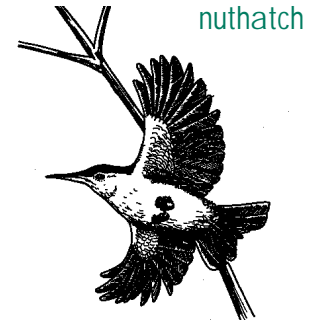
refer to the chapter on **Homes for Wildlife**, and the other chapters in this section.

Wildlife feeders can provide an opportunity to view wildlife from the comfort of your home. The most popular types of wildlife feeders are those for backyard birds. Because this is the most common type of wildlife feeding, there are a wide variety of feeders to choose from. However, feeders can also be provided for other species such as pheasants, bobwhite quail, white-tailed deer, squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, raccoons, butterflies, and moths. When food supplies are scarce, such as in the very early spring or during bouts of severe weather, wildlife will rely more on your feeders. Do not worry that the animals will become dependent on your feeders. If you have to stop feeding for a month or so, they will find alternate sources.

### Backyard Birds

#### Location

The combination of habitat diversity and the quality of available food are what will attract and keep songbirds at your backyard feeders. Pick a location that can be seen from your house, where the seed hulls and bird droppings won't be a problem, and that you can easily access year-round for filling and cleaning. If possible, locate the feeders near shelter such as evergreen or deciduous shrubbery that will provide protection from



nuthatch

predators and winter winds. Placing a discarded Christmas tree near the feeding stations may help with this winter component. It is best to place hanging bird feeders on a metal pole rather than on a tree limb, as this will help you to deter squirrel problems. Locating feeding stations in several areas in the yard reduces crowding and lessens the chance for avian diseases that can kill birds. Providing a water source in addition to feeders will also help to attract birds to an area. Water that is dripping or splashing is especially attractive to birds. There is no best time to start feeding birds. Once food is presented and the birds find it, they will visit year-round.

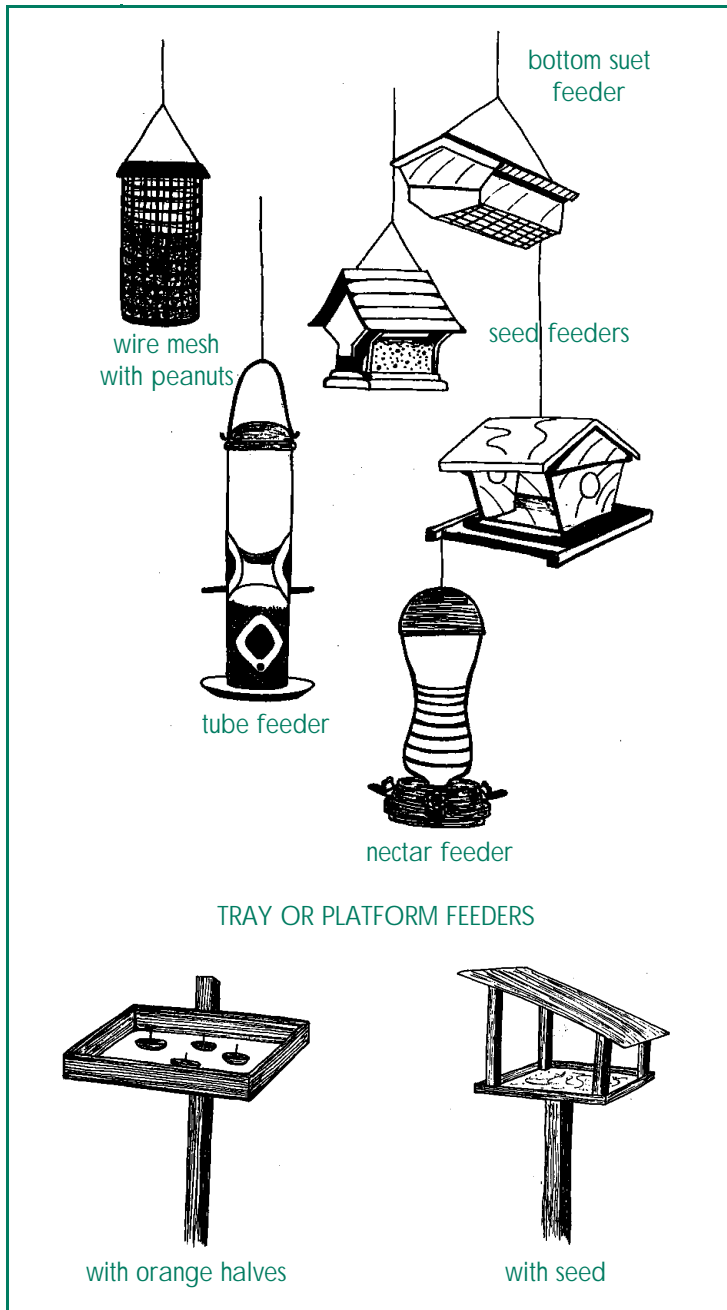
#### Feeders and Food

Bird feeders are made of many different kinds of materials. They range from the simple disposable bag feeders to elaborate steel, plastic, or glass feeders. Disposable feeders are made of cloth, nylon, vinyl, and metal netting. These feeders are inexpensive, but they do not protect the seed from the elements. Other more durable feeders are made of

materials such as plastic tubes; ceramic and terra cotta; woods such as redwood, cedar, birch, pine, and plywood; metal sheets, glass tubes, and bottles. Most of these will keep seed dry, but you should make sure that there are holes in the bottoms to ensure drainage. If the feeders have trays, look for shallow trays that will catch the seed but not collect water. Ultimately the feeder that you choose will depend on the types of birds you want to attract.

You should begin by determining which species are likely to frequent your yard. This is based on the type of habitat that surrounds your house. What you feed and how you present it will determine what kinds of birds, and how many, will visit your feeders. You can offer a variety of preferred foods based on what species you want to attract. Offering commercially prepared mixed bird seed is not as effective as preparing foods customized to the birds you want to attract. Most seeds in commercial mixes get thrown out of the feeder as the

birds search for their favorite seed. This favorite is the black oil sunflower seed. It can be used in commercial feeders, tray or platform feeders, and tube feeders. It is generally a safe choice as it is the favorite of most birds that visit these types of feeders. The most effective way to attract the largest variety of birds is to provide separate feeders for each food. Below is



a description of the more specific types of feeders and foods, along with the species that each would attract.

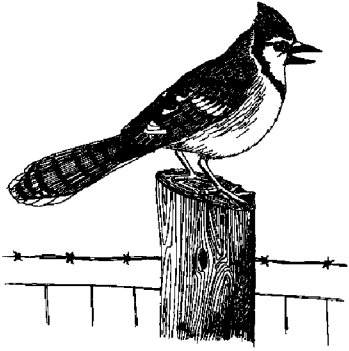
**Tube feeders** are cylindrical tubes with several slots for feeding. When filled with *black oil sunflower seeds*, the tube feeders will attract goldfinches, chickadees, purple and house finches, woodpeckers, nut-hatches, titmice, redpolls, and pine

siskins. Adding a tray to this feeder will attract larger species that can not perch on the small feeding holes, such as cardinals, jays, crossbills, mourning doves, and white-throated and white-crowned sparrows. A tube feeder containing *Niger thistle seed* with a tray will attract goldfinches, chickadees, redpolls, pine siskins, purple and house finches, white-throated sparrows, song sparrows, and dark-eyed juncos. In addition, if the tube feeder is an upside-down feeder (has feeding holes below the perches), only goldfinches will use it. When filled with *peanuts*, a tube feeder with a tray will attract cardinals, chickadees, grackles, house finches, titmice, house sparrows, starlings, mourning doves, white-throated sparrows, jays, and juncos.

**Tray or platform feeders** are open feeders that can either be on the ground or raised up on a stand, and have a lip around the edges to help hold seed on the tray. This type of feeder provides easy access for many species of birds. When

filled with *black oil sunflower seed* it is a very general feeder and will attract most backyard bird species. When filled with *millet* the platform feeder will attract doves, house sparrows, blackbirds, juncos, cowbirds, towhees, chipping, field, and tree sparrows, and white-throated and white-crowned sparrows. When filled with *corn* the platform feeder may attract starlings, house

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blue jay

sparrows, grackles, jays, juncos, doves, white-throated sparrows, bobwhite quail, pheasants, and grouse. When filled with *peanuts* the platform feeder will attract the same species as those attracted to a tube feeder of peanuts mentioned above. Adding grit to platform feeders will aid birds in digestion as they use it in their crop for grinding food.

**Suet feeders** contain suet cakes that are made from animal fat generally derived from beef, pork, or deer. It can be set out as just suet, or mixed with seed, dried fruit, or other foods. Suet is most commonly used in the winter as it is a high energy food used in those times when food is the most scarce. There are several ways of displaying suet. It can be placed in a simple hanging bag such as an old onion or potato sack. Or, it can be placed in a feeder that is rectangular and has a grid-like pattern across it for feeding access. This feeder can either be laid out, or suspended. Suet feeders will attract chickadees, downy woodpeckers, hairy woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, white- and red-breasted nuthatches, and pileated woodpeckers. A hanging suet feeder will also attract wrens, kinglets, thrashers, creepers, cardinals, and starlings. A feeder containing *peanut butter suet* will

attract woodpeckers, juncos, thrushes, kinglets, wrens, starlings, goldfinches, cardinals, jays, and bluebirds. Suet feeders with access only through the bottom will make it difficult for starlings to feed as they can not hang up-side-down very well.

**Nectar feeders** are glass and plastic feeders that contain a sugar water solution that can be made at home (four parts boiling water to one part sugar), or purchased commercially. These feeders are most popularly used to attract hummingbirds. However, other birds that have been known to feed on nectar include orioles, tanagers, cardinals, finches, woodpeckers, and thrushes. These birds will not eat out of feeders made specifically for hummingbirds, as they need larger perches. However, there are also feeders made with these perches.

Many birds will feed on **fruit**, such as an orange half, if it is simply placed out on a ledge or speared on a tree limb. Birds that are attracted to fruit are orioles, tanagers, mockingbirds, thrashers, bluebirds, cardinals, woodpeckers, jays, starlings, thrushes, cedar waxwings, and yellow-breasted chats. These birds may also eat grape jelly if it is placed out on small trays. Feeding with fruit is usually done in the summer.



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## Potential Problems

After you have set up your feeders you may find that you have unwanted guests. One such problem is that of other animals eating out of, and sometimes

## downy woodpecker

monopolizing, the feeders. Squirrels are the biggest culprits when it comes to taking over bird feeders, as they scare off birds when they are at the feeders, and often end up destroying the feeder by gnawing right through it. The simplest solution to the squirrel problem is to place the feeder on a pole away from houses and nearby tree limbs, and place a baffle on the pole. A baffle is a smooth metal sleeve or cone that prevents climbing. The most effective squirrel-proof feeder is the pole-mounted metal house type with a perch that closes the feeder when something as heavy as a squirrel sits on it. You may also want to place feeders specifically for squirrels among your other feeders, as this will deter them from the bird feeders. Other seed snatchers include chipmunks, rats, and mice. Reducing seed spillage under the feeder by avoiding mixed bird seed will deter them. Also, storing your seed in metal garbage cans will eliminate consumption of stored food.



Another problem encountered at feeders is that of predators. Avoid placing the feeders in an area that has a lot of ground cover as this provides good places for mammalian predators to hide. Cats pose a serious threat to backyard birds, especially to nestlings, fledglings, and roosting birds, as they are not natural predators. When a cat is present in your yard you are not likely to see many birds at your feeders. If possible, keep cats indoors, or use a belled collar to warn birds. Other predators that

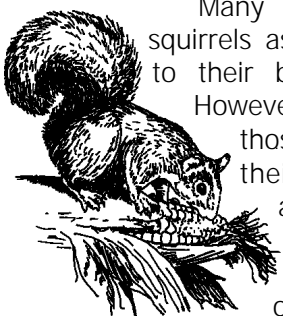
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you may see that do not present a problem are the Cooper's hawk and the sharp-shinned hawk. These birds are natural predators and play an important part in the natural community. Do not be concerned about the occasional kill these birds may make. Observing all birds in their natural behaviors is one of the joys of feeding them.

A serious problem encountered at many feeders that can easily be avoided, is that of avian diseases. When feeders are not properly maintained they become havens for bacteria. Several precautions can be taken to ensure that the birds visiting your feeders remain healthy. Avoid crowding the birds in a small space, as overcrowding facilitates the spread of diseases. Keep the feeders clean of waste and food droppings. Feeders should be cleaned once or twice a month with a mixture of warm soapy water and a capful or two of household bleach. Clean more often during humid summer months and cool, wet weather to avoid food spoilage.

## Other Wildlife Feeders

### Spike Corn Feeders



Many people view squirrels as a nuisance to their bird feeders. However, there are those that enjoy their playful antics and would like to see more of them in

their yards. Squirrels can be fed by placing ears of corn on spikes that are fastened to trees or platforms. If the ears are not attached, the squirrels will carry them away. Pheasants and deer may also use this type of feeder, especially if you live near agricultural land.

### Log and Stump Feeders

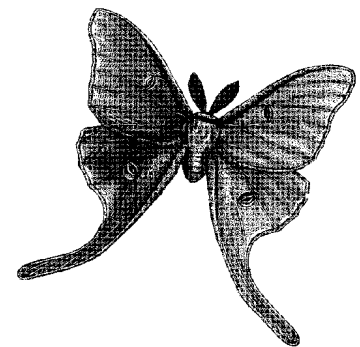
A log or a large diameter branch laid horizontally, either on the ground or slightly raised can be used as a feeding station for squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, deer, and various birds. One way to present food on this feeder is to create hollowed spots on the top side of the log and fill them with seed, corn, peanuts, or suet. Other options include placing spiked corn cobs or fruit on the top of the log. These methods can also be used in the same way on the top of a tree stump. Drilled holes on the side of a dead tree that are filled with suet may attract woodpeckers.

### Butterfly and Moth Feeders

You will attract many butterflies and moths by planting wildflowers. However, supplemental feeders will increase the likelihood that they will frequent your area. Butterflies can be fed by simply placing a small plastic kitchen sponge in a sugar solution in a shallow bowl. They will land on the sponge and lap the solution through the holes just as they would from a flower. Moths are slightly more difficult to feed. There are several "brews" that when painted on a tree at night will attract moths. One such

brew calls for mashed fermented peaches and sugar. Another such brew calls for four pounds sugar, one bottle of stale beer, and some cheap rum. A third recipe consists of fermented bananas, dried apricots, and brown sugar. Checking the trees at night with a flashlight will allow you to spot the moths.

In summary, the more habitat components you have available in your yard, the more wildlife species you will attract. There are many ways that you can add the important habitat component of food to your yard. To supplement the natural food components in your area, you can add wildlife feeders to your yard. These feeders, if properly implemented and maintained, will provide you with the opportunity to view wildlife and learn about their natural behaviors.



### FOR ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS CONTACT:

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**Private Land Partnerships:** This partnership was formed between both private and public organizations in order to address private lands wildlife issues. Individuals share resources, information, and expertise. This landowner's guide has been a combined effort between these groups working towards one goal: Natural Resources Education. We hope this manual provides you with the knowledge and the motivation to make positive changes for our environment.

**FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE:** CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT