

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

December 2006

FEEDING BIRDS

Winter is a great time to watch birds. Although there are fewer species around, many will visit feeders. When to feed birds, what to feed them and what kinds of feeders work best are very common questions.

If you choose to feed birds, you can feed them all year long. Birds can always find enough food and don't become solely dependant on a single feeder. Having feeders up all year will not prevent birds from migrating in the fall. The urge to migrate is very strong and the feeders will help them refuel before the next leg of their journey. For winter feeding, starting in early November and then continuing all winter until late spring is best. You can even start in early fall to attract migrants.



Feeders

Feeders come in a variety of different styles and each style attracts a different group of birds. Having several kinds with different types of food will attract the most birds.

The most common feeder types are: platform, tube, hopper, suet, thistle and specialty. Platform feeders are used by birds like sparrows and doves. You can fill them with white millet or sunflower seeds.

Tube feeders can be filled with many different seeds but the best is the black oil sunflower. Chickadees, nuthatches, finches, and many other species will feed at these ones. Buying one with a cone in the bottom, prevents seeds from staying wet and getting mouldy.

Hopper feeders again are best filled with black oil, attracting many species. Larger birds like blue jays, grosbeaks, and even the occasional squirrel are best suited to these feeders.



Suet feeders hold suet, which is beef fat. It can be either rendered or bought in packages. Woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees all love suet.

There are a variety of specialty feeders that attract specific groups of birds. Thistle feeders are filled with nyger or thistle seed and attract goldfinches, pine siskins, and redpolls. Hummingbird feeders come in many shapes. They should be filled with sugar water (a 1:4 ratio). There is no need to put red food colouring in the water. The feeders have red on them and that is enough to attract hummingbirds. Buying a feeder that is easy to clean is best as the sugar water goes bad quite quickly.

Did you know?

That only 12% of Manitoba's birds stay for the winter.



That bird watching is one of the fastest growing outdoor activities



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Food

Each species of bird has a preferred type of food. The chart below lists the seed preferences of many common backyard birds.

Black oil seeds are smaller than regular sunflower seeds and are not striped. They have thinner shells and a higher oil content. If you are only going to use one type of seed this is the one.

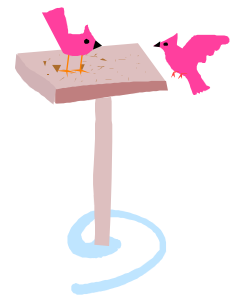
SEED PREFERENCES

	Black oil Sunflower	Striped Sunflower	Safflower	Nyger/thistle	Cracked Corn	Shelled Peanuts	Peanuts in the Shell	White Millet	Suet
American Goldfinch	X			X					
Black-capped Chickadee	X	X	X			X			X
Blue Jay	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
Common Redpoll	X			X					
Dark-eyed Junco	X				X			X	
Downy Woodpecker	X					X	X		X
Evening Grosbeak	X	X							
Hairy Woodpecker	X					X	X		X
Hoary Redpoll	X			X					
House Finch	X	X	X	X					
House Sparrow	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Mourning Dove	X		X		X			X	
Pine Siskin	X			X				X	
Purple Finch	X	X		X					
Red-breasted Nuthatch	X								X
White-breasted Nuthatch	X	X	X			X			X
White-crowned Sparrow	X	X						X	
White-throated Sparrow	X	X			X			X	

Feeder Care

Feeders should be placed less than 0.5m or more than 4.5m from windows and about 2m from the nearest vegetation. This will ensure that the birds don't hit the windows and have enough time to escape from predators.

Feeders should be cleaned every few months with a bleach and water solution (1:9 ratio) and then rinsed thoroughly. Wooden feeders should be cleaned more frequently. The seeds and droppings underneath the feeders should also be cleaned up at least twice a year. Cleaning your feeder will prevent diseases from infecting birds that visit your feeder and cleaning underneath it will prevent rats and disease as well.



Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre is a joint project of Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Province of Manitoba

