

Birds

***** **BIRDS** ***** **BIRDS** ***** **BIRDS** *****

By Sherry Cossey, Bird Chairman WACONIAH August 2009

My particular love is with birds – in my yard, along the highway, in nature...anyplace. Here is some information we should be alert to.

Alert! In February, the Audubon Society study found that more than half of the 305 bird species in North America are spending the winter about 35 miles further north than they did 40 years ago.

Alert! Global warming has pushed such birds as the Pine Siskin 288 miles further north. The American Robin – 206 miles during the last 10 to 15 years. Tree swallows have moved 59 miles further north and are breeding 9 days earlier in spring.

Alert! A three-year study in Wisconsin found when temperatures fall below 10 degrees, Blackcapped Chickadees without access to feeders have only a 37% survival rate as opposed to the much higher 69% survival rate for those able to utilize feeders. They love black oil sunflower seeds.

Alert! Late arrival, or arrival in poor condition, on the breeding grounds because of inadequate food and rest en route, is likely to jeopardize a bird's ability to reproduce.

Alert! The Pacific Region has two of the largest migration routes coming from Alaska and Canada and flying to winter grounds in Mexico and Central America and reverse in spring. About half of all migrating birds do not survive to make the return trip. The largest loss is attributed to not finding suitable stopover habitats in time.

What can you do to help?

You can create and restore habitat at home, at your workplace and in your local park or wildlife refuge. You can make any property attractive to birds by offering water, shelter, feed and nesting habitat.

- Providing water can be as simple as putting out a bird bath or as complicated as installing a pond with a creek and waterfall. Birdbaths can be large or small; keep the water fresh.
- Herbicides, fungicides and pesticides can be lethal to birds.
- Put out bird feeders, seed, fruit and nectar feeders, suet and fruit. Homemade feeders are numerous; you're only limited by your imagination—remember the pinecone & peanut butter. Wild bird seed mixes, black oil sunflower seeds, nyger seed.
- Landscape the yard with native evergreen and fruit bearing trees, shrubs, grasses and vines. Design the garden so that plants flower and fruit through the spring, summer and fall.

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According to the Audubon Society more than 100 North American bird species supplement their natural diets with birdseed, suet, fruit, and nectar obtained from our feeders. Not only do the birds benefit, but we get to view the birds more often and more predictably. As soon as I put out the bird seed in the trough feeder on my deck in the early morning the stellar jays and California jays are there taking their favorite seeds followed by the spotted towhees, white crowned sparrows, and other LBG (little brown-grey) birds later in the morning and afternoon. To keep birds coming back to your feeders in any season provide them with a variety of quality seed, fresh water for drinking and bathing, and ample cover for nesting sites and protection from predators. Feeders vary according to the seed you put out and to what you want to buy or build. A good website for choosing feeders is at audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_feeding/choosing.feeder. There you can read about ground feeders, sunflower-seed tube feeders, suet feeders, hopper feeders, and thistle (nyjer) feeders.

One of my favorite feeders is a tube feeder that hangs from an eave outside my kitchen window with black-oil sunflower seed. The chickadees love this as do everything else from sparrows and house finches to black-headed grosbeak and the jays. Of course the jays are too big and don't have much

success and the turkeys come along and pick up what is dropped on the ground. It has several stations and I have seen as many as five birds feeding simultaneously. It has a "protective" ledge at the top with a spring attachment which causes the feeding holes to be closed if a squirrel or raccoon gets on the top of it. My other favorite is a mesh sock feeder for nyjer seed for the various gold finches which hangs at the other side of my window. They just love it and share it well. I have seen seven little yellow birds all feeding at once! They are so bright and cheery.

Another website to check out for building your own feeders is mybackyardplans.com/birdfeeders.php. The articles give you the tools and materials needed and specific measurements as well as a picture and description of what to put in it for the birds. A useful article by Alex Strauss which talks about attracting the birds can be found at birdwatching.suite101.com/article.cfm/attracting-birdsto-a-backyard-bird-feeder.