

The 2010 Winter Bird Feeder Survey:

*You can encourage Northern
mockingbirds to visit your yard by
having fruit trees or bushes. They
prefer blackberries and mulberries.*

Most people have a well-known neighborhood eatery that they can always visit in order to grab a bite to eat. Usually though, they spend more time gabbing and people-watching than they do eating.

You know the kind. Walking in, you already know what is going on. There is a mix of people around the diner. A group of well-aged fellows sit in the middle, taking up more space than needed and being the “popular” crowd. Everyone knows everyone else and they will converse about the week’s events while sipping coffee and slowly eating their meals.

There are usually a couple of families sitting off to the sides by themselves. The mothers are trying to keep everyone

ing and turn to stare for a moment at the newcomer. Then everything returns to the normal pace, with everyone keeping the same routine day after day.

I can relate to this scenario. In my neighborhood there is an eatery that attracts a wide array of characters that you can’t help but watch.

The diners that are always there include a group of excited, talkative blondes who are always together for their meals, but they tend to leave just as other folks start to arrive. A shy nibbler sometimes comes along, but won’t stay to chat. She will retreat to a lonely corner to eat her meal before returning for seconds and dessert.

make it out with their dinner.

I can always tell when the diner is about to close because the excitement quickly dies down. There are a few couples that always come in for a late-night snack just before dark. They must have hefty appetites since they are always the first visitors for breakfast the next morning.

This eatery is quite amusing and I could watch it for hours. The characters that are so very different are birds, and the eating establishment is an array of backyard bird feeders.

Every winter, I look forward to the antics that I might see at my bird feeders. Each day, the cardinals, house finches,

One Interesting Buffet

By Lesley B. McNeff

satisfied and quieter than the men in the center of the diner. Paying attention to everyone else, the families always seem busy, but they enjoy every minute of the busy establishment.

There will be a couple of loners sitting at the bartop, keeping to themselves and talking only to the waitress. They might be reading the paper and looking around nervously toward the louder men. Walking in, they will sit down and immediately order their meal. As soon as the meal arrives, it is eaten, paid for and they head for the door.

If anyone new walks in, the entire diner seems to stop everything they are do-

Other folks are really into junk food. They strut around in their black jackets colored with red and yellow and soon outnumber all others. They quickly crowd the eatery, gobbling whatever appears on the day’s menu. A few of their smaller cousins, who wear matching brown jackets and gray caps, often stand around waiting for a free handout.

It gets much more interesting when a rough looking fellow pushes his way in front of the others to steal their food. Sometimes he succeeds, but it is more fun to watch when he does not. There is a group of tough redheads that hang around and will see to it that he does not

dark-eyed juncos, blue jays and goldfinches put on a different show from the day before. All of these visitors and many others can be seen in Oklahoma and are especially prevalent during the annual Winter Bird Feeder Survey.

The 2010 Winter Bird Feeder Survey runs from January 7 to the 10. Anyone in Oklahoma can be a weekend biologist during this time by watching and recording the numbers of certain birds at their feeders. These numbers help Wildlife Department biologists track upward and downward trends of species and provide information about potential conservation issues.



The white-breasted nuthatch is known to move up and down large trees at odd angles.

So What's On the Menu?

In order to obtain the highest species diversity, one should offer a variety of food. At first glance it may seem that buying the pre-mixed seed is the best value for your bird feeding dollar. Maybe, but if most of the seed mix ends up on the ground for not-so-desirable species, the money may be better spent on preferred seeds in bulk and mixing them at home. In providing seeds, you are supplying all bird species a portion of their diet. Now let's talk seeds!

Sunflower

Did you know that more than 40 species of birds prefer sunflower seeds to other foods? It is a huge source of energy and

tastes good, but it also provides iron and calcium to our feathered friends. Past studies have shown that when sunflower seed is available, most birds will sample little else, with the exception of starlings and sparrows. Maybe that's why sunflowers are so popular at the store.

White Proso Millet

Here is an interesting fact for you: one seed that is highly preferred for bird feeders has also been used for human consumption. The tiny white seeds of white proso millet are highly sought after since their seed coat is easy to break yet hardy enough to protect it from weathering. It doesn't hurt that there are more seeds for the money, either.

Nyjer

What is a seed that is grown in Africa and India, high in calories and oil and fed to wild birds? It has to be nyjer seed! Containing up to 40 percent oil, it is easy to see why some birds simply love this seed in the winter when they must have energy to keep their body temperatures up.

Safflower

Mummies found in Egyptian tombs wore cloths that were dyed red from safflower flowers. Most likely unknown to the ancient Egyptians, safflower is high in fat, oil and protein for wintering birds. It has even been proven to ward off those pesky squirrels!



The tufted titmouse will build its nest in cavities. Putting up nest boxes can entice them to your yard.



The brilliant red color of male Northern cardinals make them a favorite of many bird watchers

Suet

Ummm...raw beef fat from around the loins and kidneys. This may sound simply awful to us humans, but for many a bird, it is one of the finer things in life. Our high-energy friends gain a lot of heat from suet simply by metabolizing it. I guess there really is a use for everything.

Where's the Buffet?

Almost as important as what to eat is where to eat. In order to get the most out of bird feeding, food should be provided at a desirable location. It is important to consider placing bird feeders close to some type of escape cover. If possible, offer a wind buffer for those blustery winter days. One last thing to consider is simply where you would like to view your feeders. We all want to be as comfy as possible during the winter, snuggled up with a blanket and a cup of apple cider. Imagine doing this while watching the antics of our wintertime visitors! Feeders should be easily viewed from window locations where you feel comfortable inside the house.

But there are multiple types of feeders out there. Which one is the best for my yard? One thing to know is that the types of feeders are just as unique as the birds that you want to attract. So let's take a look at those feeders.



Platform

Who knew that old sheet of plywood out in the shop could serve a purpose! Simply set it on the ground or maybe a couple of feet above and throw that seed out and you will have all the ground-feeding birds

you could imagine. One thing to remember with a platform feeder: frequent cleaning is extremely important since the fecal material can easily build on them and help spread disease. Try to clean the platform about once a week with hot, soapy water.

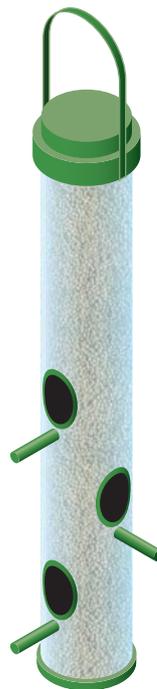
Hopper



A favorite of many, the hopper feeder is best placed right at eye level. They can be mounted on a pole or hung from a tree or the eaves of a house. Since they attract a large variety of birds, you will surely see a show. Of course, the more birds, the more feed you will go through. Given the popularity with birds, though, it is well worth the money.

Hanging/Tube

Ah. The small kid on campus. Sometimes, they just can't compete with the bigger kids. For a smaller bird, that's where the tube feeder comes in. It offers numerous perched feeding stations with seed holes that allow the bird to pick one seed at a time. This will eliminate a lot of wasted materials as well as not allow fecal material to build.



The Results Are In...

In 2009, there were 4,364 birds representing 52 species seen at feeders. Birders in 42 counties throughout Oklahoma participated in the survey.

Top 10 Birds Seen

American goldfinch
Dark-eyed junco
Northern cardinal
Red-winged blackbird
House sparrow
Mourning dove
Carolina chickadee
Tufted titmouse
House finch
Blue jay

Suet Feeder

Yes, back to the fat. Suet is preferred by woodpeckers and other birds that eat insects. There is a special feeder sold for suet. Be sure to place it against the trunk of a tree where these birds are sure to use it. One homemade option can be used for suet as well. Take an old mesh onion or potato sack, place the suet inside and hang from a visible tree. Again, there must be a use for everything.

One More Year Down, Many to Go

Please visit our website at www.wildlifedepartment.com to download the Winter Bird Feeder Survey form. The more help we get, the better we can manage the birds for future viewing. Remember, the survey is only for those birds seen at your feeders. Fly-bys don't count! If you happen to see a bird that is not listed on the form, please take note of it. We love to hear interesting sightings.

So download that form and enjoy your birding. Oh, and thank you for being a weekend biologist! 🌿