

Feeding Winter Birds

Feeding birds in winter is a wonderful way to add colour and vibrancy to a drab snowy day and to learn more about the many species which inhabit or visit PEI during the colder months.

For a lot of birds, winter is a time when there is often less food available and there is less day-light time to look for food. Feeders can become a welcome source of food.

There are dozens of types of birds on PEI during the winter months. To see a seasonal list of birds visit; <http://www.gov.pe.ca/birds/index.php3>. Make sure to click on the official Island bird checklist.

Keep in mind that there is a significant difference in the food needs of various types of birds. Some prefer feeding on sunflower seed whereas others may use cereal grains (e.g. wheat, barley), millet, niger, fruit (berries), or suet. Some are also generalists and will use a wide variety of food types. Try different varieties until you identify what types are being eaten.

Some birds feed on the ground whereas others like food displayed off the ground. For ground feeders, the food can be spread on the ground or on a larger raised tray, for those that like food displayed off the ground use hanging feeders or feeders attached to posts, decks, or trees.

Ensure your bird feeder is protected from the wind. If possible, use your house to provide some wind protection. Dense trees or shrubs will provide both wind protection as well as provide escape cover from predators such as the Sharp-shinned Hawk and cats.

Once you have established a bird feeder, ensure the feeder is filled regularly because birds become habituated to food sources. Avoid placing feeders where birds have the illusion that they can fly through windows, causing injury or death.

Certain species, such as the Blue Jay and Red Squirrel are notorious for eating huge amounts of sunflower seed. In addition to consuming a lot of food, Red Squirrels can be destructive to bird feeders and sometimes buildings. Consider buying or building a squirrel-resistant feeder.

If feed becomes mould infested, remove it and place it in your compost bin. Certain birds are prone to infectious diseases that can be carried in bird droppings - House Finch Eye Disease in particular is becoming more prevalent in the region. To discourage disease, clean feeders regularly and disinfect them using a 1:10 mixture of bleach to water concentration.

If you have any questions regarding winter bird feeding please contact the Fish, Forest and Wildlife division of the PEI Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry at (902)-368-4700.