



WINTER BIRD FEEDING

As winter's frost and chills set in and linger, wildlife face the annual problem of a declining food source. Little is in bloom, seeds are scarce, the buzzing of insects is rare, tree trunks and branches are exposed, and fish and rodent populations have been depleted. Entire ecosystems are in the midst of the lean, winter months.

During the cold season, the majority of all birds and mammals treated at WRA's care centre are thin, if not emaciated, upon arrival. Some of them are facing their first winter, others are weak from long migrations, and still others have had their injuries compounded by their vulnerable winter condition.

Yet, it is easy to help the animals which share your gardens. By placing feeders in the backyard, it is possible to supplement, if not support, an animal's diet during Jack Frost's months. Most species of birds will find nourishment in one of the following winter recipes:

- A wild bird seed mixture, or specific seeds for specific birds, e.g., niger for bushtits and chickadees, and millet for finches, juncos and sparrows.
- One pound of melted beef suet mixed with one cup of unsalted peanut butter and one cup of cornmeal. When cool, wild birdseed, raisins and sunflower seeds can be added to the mixture.

All feeders should be kept away from windows to prevent birds from flying into them; be made of non-metal substances as a bird's skin will freeze to the metal in cold weather; and be cleaned regularly with a solution of dish soap, ten parts hot water and one part bleach as both wet seed and bird droppings can cause disease. Ideally, the feeder should be placed on a tree branch away from shrubs or other plants that cats can hide in. Ground feeding birds, such as juncos, will feed on bits of food that fall down from the feeder.

CAUTION: If you live in an area where bears are nearby, only keep your feeder up from November to March while bears are hibernating, or at least not actively feeding.

Well-maintained feeders can go a long way in helping our wildlife through the winter months. Welcome and enjoy them.