



Year Round Songbird Care

In the winter, songbirds are constantly burning energy to stay warm, to stay alive! Clumps of native, evergreen shrubs will provide a much needed respite from the weather. Come dawn, our over-wintering songbirds are on the move, visiting feeders they know they can count on to replenish critical energy stores they burned up during the night! It is very important to continue to provide for your songbirds if you will be away. Ask a neighbor to top up the feeders daily or if gone for a short time, hang a couple of seed bells on a pole feeder system with baffle.

Songbird window strikes occur year round. Often you won't even hear the strike occur. Please be sure to make your windows visible to songbirds by attaching "Window Alert" transparent decals. The closer the decals to one another, the better. CollidEscape is the ideal for protecting songbirds from window strikes. Please visit <http://www.flap.org/film.htm>

Please read on to prepare your property to help our feathered friends through the long winter ahead.

1) Bird Feeders and Baths

DID YOU KNOW?

Use feeders until late spring then rely upon what nature produces as the food source for songbirds. Incorporate into your property a variety of

NATIVE, berry-producing, insect-attracting (food for songbirds!) and seed-bearing shrubs, trees, grasses and wildflowers which flower and produce food throughout the full year. Creating habitat on your property greatly increases the likelihood of experiencing the enjoyment of seeing colorful songbirds as they migrate through the city of Toronto every spring and fall! Come dawn, migratory songbirds will come down to eat, drink, rest and seek protection from hawks in the trees and shrubs you've provided. A variety of native species make your property greatly appealing as a rest stop for anywhere from a few hours to a couple of days!

Please visit Talks/Tours on this website for an upcoming speaking engagement. You will learn how and what to plant for songbird conservation as well as how to “shop wisely” to protect songbirds.

Residential songbird garden tours are also available.

Natural Feeders

Please do not cut back your flowers and grasses until late spring. Songbirds use the seeds as a food source over the winter.

*Wash and soak your bird feeders and bird bath with warm, mild soap, with a 1:10 ratio of bleach:water. Rinse very well and dry well. (Repeat seasonally and as needed.)

Purchasing

Feeders are available at hardware stores as well as bird specialty stores. Quality costs more but it also lasts much longer. Avoid tube feeders with a base to catch seed. Pigeons will hang off it.

Location

Strangely enough, ***ON*** the window or as close as possible is the best location for a bird feeder. The songbirds will be focusing on landing at the feeder rather than the reflection of trees and sky in the glass which ultimately leads to birds hitting the window.

Be sure to locate feeders and baths away from shrubs and trees that could hide a cat! Cat predation of songbirds is a serious problem which is contributing to songbird decline. International songbird researchers are highlighting the importance of “cats indoors.” Please visit www.abcbirds.org to learn more.

Heated bird baths (as seen in photo above) provide a much-needed year round water source and entertainment for you in the winter! Non, bird specialty stores are less likely to carry this product. Available as either a device you put in the water or as a heating coil located within the basin of the bath itself. (I have found the latter continues to be a great investment 5 years later.) * **A YEAR-ROUND WATER SOURCE IS A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF CREATING RESIDENTIAL, SONGBIRD HABITAT.** Please consider creating a “naturalized” downspout pond. Please visit “The Benefits of Trees and Wildlife Pond Creation” article found under the Education section of the EDUCATION/RESEARCH tab.

Tube feeders work well in deterring pigeons.

A pole and baffle feeding station set up 8-9' from the nearest tree branch, deck or wires is a great investment and allows for squirrel-free bird feeding with a variety of feeder types.

Niger tube feeders have tiny holes compared to regular feeders. (Seed is more expensive but feeders can be hung successfully in trees.) Buy feeders with a yellow top or attach a bright, yellow ribbon to help attract Goldfinches.

2) Make your windows “visible” to songbirds to reduce collisions.

A suction cup and hook with long ribbons tied to it, attached to the exterior of your window, can work well to deter daytime bird strikes. It will break up the reflection of the trees.

“Window Alert”/“Maple Alert”, a transparent decal, also works well and does not obscure your viewing pleasure of the outdoors. However, place decals closer together than recommended and be sure to replace them as advised. This product is sold in songbird specialty stores/bird seed stores and through the International Migratory Bird Day website www.birdday.org. * 100% full proof protection from bird strikes is achievable with a product called, *CollidEscape*. Please visit www.flap.org/film.htm or www.flap.org to learn more.

*Placing a bird feeder on your window (provided “Kitty” doesn’t sit outside, below it!) is the safest place for a feeder when it comes to preventing bird strikes. The songbirds are focused on the feeder rather than the reflection of the trees in the window.

3) *Experienced a bird strike at home?*

Place the songbird in a box, in a warm, dark, quiet place without food or water. Call Toronto Wildlife Center (TWC) at 416-631-0662 (It is located at Downsview airport base.) Possible head injuries may be able to be successfully treated if you take the bird to the TWC within a couple of hours.

Please also visit the TWC website for advice.

www.torontowildlifecentre.com

You may also wish to try contacting, Darlene: licensed songbird rehabilitator 519-888-0154

4) *Keep CATS Indoors!*

Cat predation is a very serious problem resulting in the unnecessary death of millions of songbirds annually.

Songbirds did not evolve with cats and therefore do not recognize them as a predator and are defenseless against them. Please visit the American Bird Conservancy website www.abcbirds.org to learn more and to find alternative solutions. Includes excellent educational fact sheets. * The ***Canadian Cats Indoors Campaign will be launched in June '09.*** Please visit the Toronto Wildlife Center website to learn more. www.torontowildlifecentre.com

5) *Bird Feeder Fun For Everyone!*

- I. Collect pine cones, tie string to one end, roll cones in Crisco being sure to put on a good, thick layer, roll in bird seed and hang on the tree for songbirds! (No doubt squirrels will visit too!)
- II. Recycled Bird Feeder

Get creative! An old, washed out, 2 litre milk or juice carton can be made into a bird feeder. See if you can figure out how!
Tip: Birds don't like wet seed so be sure to make use of the flap when you are creating the openings.

III. Project Feeder Watch

www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

Become a citizen scientist and support songbird conservation! Identify and count birds at your feeder this winter! Fun for families and individuals alike!

6) Bird Seed

(Cheap seed is often of poor quality, containing a lot of corn and other filler which birds will toss aside and which attracts squirrels.)

The following seed is favored by Cardinals, Blue Jays, Nuthatches, Woodpeckers, Chickadees, House Finches and Goldfinches,...

Seed: plain, black oil sunflower, safflower seed, niger seed

Suet w/cage: *plain white block (can hang on tree) or with seed is good if you have a baffle and pole system

Seed Bells or wreaths: good to use with a pole & baffle

Wreaths are a fun, seasonal treat for songbirds.

Shell-less, roasted peanuts : use with a peanut feeder

(A favorite of Nuthatches, Chickadees and Woodpeckers.)

(Roasted is important but also expensive. Roast your own.

The house will smell terrific! Roast at 385 degrees for 10min, turn over, cook another 10min. Done!)

7) SHELTER: Bird Houses, Brush piles, Planting

Bird houses will be used by songbirds to escape the elements and to store seeds for the winter provided that in the fall, you clean them out with a stiff brush and repair any damage. The size of the entrance hole determines what species of songbird will nest in it. Purchase a metal hole reinforcer at a bird specialty store to maintain the hole size otherwise squirrels or starlings can enter.

A 3cm diameter metal hole reinforcer will enable Chickadees and Nuthatches to enter and deter other, non-native, highly problematic, invasive species such as sparrows and starlings which out compete without native songbirds for food and shelter. The height at which you place the birdhouse will also determine its' attractiveness to specific songbird species. Please visit the following link to assist you in locating your birdhouse as well as to learn about bird hole and nesting box dimensions by species. Click on "Table 2" under the "General Information" heading. <http://www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?id=228>
Leave the birdhouse up for a year or two before trying a new location.

Brush piles will be used by birds and mammals as a temporary shelter from the elements. It can be made by arranging old branches in a tee-pee fashion (crossing branches at the top) with the thicker/heavier branches secured (dug into) the ground, well. Place a couple of logs or rocks in the center of tee pee so small mammals can perch off the cold ground. Continue to cover with branches until interior is well hidden. Add on top some evergreen branches, if possible, for added protection. Continue to add to seasonally. Cover with vines for greater obscurity if you like.

Christmas Trees!

Once you are finished with your tree, remove all tinsel and any other decorations, and tie it to a fixed object outside. It will provide much needed shelter for songbirds over the winter. In the spring, cut it up and add it to a brush pile.

*Planting with NATIVE species for songbird conservation.

Your ultimate goal is to incorporate both evergreen and deciduous, native shrubs and trees into your garden to provide year-round shelter for songbirds as well as potential nesting sites and natural food sources. Native evergreens such as Eastern White Cedar can provide a great privacy fence while also providing for songbirds. Evergreens planted in clumps are particularly appealing. Deciduous, native, berry-producing shrubs, planted in a multi-tier fashion from the highest tree on your property on downward are very appealing to songbirds not only for food but also as a planting style which affords them an escape/protection from hawks. They will feel safe there and are more likely to hang around your property for protection as well as to feast on the natural sources of food. If possible, add a year-round water source, too! By incorporating native species to feed and shelter songbirds, you are in effect engaging in ecological restoration which in turn supports beneficial insects, amphibians, songbirds, right up the food chain! Even our own health and well being are being protected. (i.e. Songbirds are important for seed dispersal and pest infestation control. Hummingbirds are pollinators!) Songbirds are a bio-indicator species. If they are thriving in the present state of our environment, so too, likely are we! Unfortunately, songbird populations are indicating otherwise so it is time for all of us to begin to take action to protect them and to clean up our air, water and food.