

Support the Birds this Christmas
Susan Heath

While we are all enjoying the holiday season, our birds will continue their regular routine of finding food and water each day and shelter each night. We can help them out in a number of ways starting with keeping our feeders clean and full. Bird feeders can be a source of disease if they aren't kept clean so make sure you take them down and clean them every couple of months. The birds will certainly appreciate you keeping them full when it's cold outside! In addition to seed, you can provide suet which is a high energy mix that can be homemade or store



American Goldfinch by Mike Williams

bought. We make ours at home and the birds absolutely love it. Mix the following in a large bowl: 2 cups cornmeal, 2 cups quick oats, 1 cup flour, 1 ½ cups lard melted in microwave, and 1 cup chunky peanut butter. Stir until mixed well and spread it out in a couple of bread pans to ½ inch thickness. Refrigerate until hard and then cut to a size that will fit in a suet basket which you can buy locally at Tractor Supply, Lowe's or Home Depot. Hang it in your yard and watch the action!

Another thing you can do to help the birds this holiday season is to keep your yard bird friendly. Birds need water of course and you can put in a bird bath or water dripper for them. The Blue Jays love to bathe in our bird bath and sometimes they line up waiting their turn. That is very fun to watch. They really go at it when they get in the water too. You can provide a lot of natural food by planting native plants and removing exotic ones. Native plants provide more food resources in the form of berries, nuts, and seeds but they also host more insects than exotic ones because our native fauna are not adapted to live on exotic plant varieties. Birds also need a safe place to roost each night and contrary to popular belief they do not roost in a nest. Some birds will roost in a nest box but most of them roost in a sheltered area of thick vegetation. Providing native plants can help out with this too but you can also make a brush pile with branches that have fallen or that you've trimmed. This will provide a safe place to roost at night and also to hide in the day if a predator is around.

One final thing you can do for our birds is to keep your cat indoors. Research has demonstrated that even well fed cats will hunt and kill birds, small reptiles, and amphibians. Kitty just can't help himself and our birds suffer for it. Cats are actually healthier if kept inside and they won't get run over by a car. PetsMart and Petco have living greens for cats that you can keep inside so your kitty can still have something green to munch on without going outside and putting our birds at risk. So let's all get together and do something good for the birds this Christmas!