



An American Goldfinch shares the thistle feeder with a Pine Siskin, a sporadic winter visitor from The North.

THIS ISSUE

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Winter Bird Feeding Presentation, by Appt

Nature Discovery Also Offers...

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U.S. a Climate Action Pariah

Manage Your Own Upscale “Birdaurant”

One winter back in the early 2000s my retired parents had driven from the Chicago area to pay our young family a visit. Shortly after their arrival we sat and talked over hot beverages around the dining room table that was situated immediately in front of our bay window. There was already snow on the ground, but more flakes had begun to fall in earnest. This was to be more than just a passing squall, and snowflakes weren't all that swirled. A flurry of variably sized and colored wings whisked, darted and hovered back and forth, down then up, in a continuously ebbing and flowing multidirectional wave of turbulence. Overlapping chirps and peeps, though muffled to some extent by the glass barrier, still managed to permeate the conversation taking place in the dining room.

Why all the avian activity? Bird feeders, of course. But not just any old feeders haphazardly hung on some passing pretense. It was my carefully planned, constructed and arranged bird feeding station, my up-scale bird restaurant, my “birdaurant,” and every fall I endeavored to perfect its popularity among the feathered masses almost as seriously as any restaurant-for-people entrepreneur. A mere glance out our window on this day evinced that this was indeed the place to be to fill your gizzard. It was the squawk of the town.

Blue then gray, yellow then red, black and white then blue again pulsed, settled and flickered in the forms of blue jays, titmice, goldfinches, chickadees, nuthatches and house finches so close to the window that, save for the pane, you could reach out and touch them. This degree of intimacy was also planned. A purposely-arranged hub for the action - a wooden bin feeder mounted firmly atop a four-by-four post and filled with sunflower – was centered a mere two feet outside the large central pane.

I had suspended a thistle tube-feeder just inches outside each of the two opposing side panes. The perches were packed with finches of several species. While awaiting a chance to feed, dozens more landed and jockeyed for position along a loose, makeshift lattice of thin, bare branches that stretched over the feeding area. I had hand-picked, then arranged long, forking sticks in such a way that these natural perches would be heavily utilized whenever flights of magnitude arrived, as they often did on winter days like this.

My specially-fashioned “woodpecker tree” towered to the right of the bin feeder. I had cut down a small but remarkably straight walnut tree that had been growing directly under our powerlines. It measured

about six inches in diameter. I removed all the limbs, dug a post hole and sunk it such that the top was level with the top of the window. I then attached a suet cage at eye level to the viewer through the window. It firmly hugged the tree's trunk, and in so doing allowed the most natural "vertical seating" imaginable for an incessant parade up and down the trunk of several species of woodpeckers and nuthatches.

That wasn't all. Still more action was revealed to anyone who *stood* near the window. Just a few feet beyond and below the bin feeder yawned my busy "bird cave." I had constructed a lean-to shelter made of a simple, erect, three-log frame then propped woven evergreen boughs along the hypotenuse to effectively provide shelter from the elements. Once or twice a day I scattered several large cups of mixed seed under it. The cave provided shelter from wind, and the scattered seed would not become buried under snow on a day like this one. It also provided a shield from the eyes of any passing Cooper's hawk. Though effectively obstructing the contents inside from the world outside at every other angle, the mouth of the cave gaped directly at the window giving any viewer inside the pane a perfect view of the feeding activity within. Individuals of all the above-mentioned species came and went, but this milieu was especially attractive to mourning doves, juncos and tree sparrows. On some mornings a dozen plump doves or more would cram shoulder to shoulder under this security blanket and engorge their crops while a dozen more hyperactive sparrows picked and flitted around them.



The bin feeder and bird cave are at their busiest when the snow accumulates.

As we talked my dad angled his chair to face the window. Indeed, the level of commotion just outside the pane *commanded* one's attention. My mom (a staunch city-girl her entire life) took notice, looked at the window and exclaimed, "It's like a scene from *The Birds!*" My dad responded with an amused huff, and I said, "Isn't it cool?"

He stood and stepped closer to find that he could now see even dozens more on the ground as well as on top of, and under the bird cave. At home in suburban Chicago he had maintained a couple of feeders outside the window of their sunroom. He knew his share about bird feeding and feeder visitors. He had never seen an abundance and variety like this, though. "There must be a hundred birds out here!"

My parents spent the afternoon interacting with their grandkids, sharing a meal and conversing some more, but every now and then my dad was drawn back to the window – sometimes standing, other times pulling up a dining room chair – to take it all in, transfixed.

"I'm glad we don't have this many birds outside our window," my mother said to me with a laugh, loudly enough to make sure my dad heard. "Your father would never get anything done."

"Making the Ultimate Winter Bird Feeding Station for Maximum Birds & Enjoyment." Hands down this is the longest presentation title among hundreds coined over Nature Discovery's three-decade run. Starting as a slide presentation in the '90s then morphing into Powerpoint format, and incrementally improved with new photos each passing year, I've presented the topic dozens of times at libraries, garden clubs, Audubon meetings, nature centers and schools as well as at our home-based facility almost every year - usually in late fall – during our monthly open Sunday.

Here are the basics from the presentation, some of which may seem like common sense, yet – by the look of feeders in many people's yards – are unattained more often than not.

As with the pursuit of quality in any endeavor, ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING. No kidding, take the task as seriously as if you are the conscientious proprietor of a bird restaurant, and the patrons will flock. In order for any restaurant to be successful the fulfillment of certain considerations is critical. For instance...

ALWAYS BE OPEN FOR BUSINESS translates to *don't let the feeders run dry*. Birds are creatures of habit. When a cardinal awakens after a cold night and needs to refuel, its first thought is not to fly to the restaurant that is closed (feeders empty) far more often than not. It beelines to the reliable restaurant in the neighborhood – the one open twenty-four/seven.

OFFER AN ATTRACTIVE MENU. Those who only casually feed birds might be under the impression that if they buy just one bag of mixed seed they've got all the bases covered because any visiting bird can choose what it likes. Well, it turns out that certain seeds are far more popular across species than others. To drive home the point, let's just say "Never run out of these three seeds: 1. Sunflower, 2. *Sunflower*, 3. SUNFLOWER!" If you want to have success attracting birds but still would like to keep it simple by only buying one bag of seed, go for pure sunflower, *not* a mix. More feeder visiting birds prefer sunflower over any other seed. Also, there is not a single seed-eating species that refuses to eat sunflower, even if it prefers something else. Regarding mixes, sunflower typically comprises a very small percentage of the total volume. Once the sunflower has been picked out, most species fly elsewhere.



A male Red-bellied feeds comfortably - and closely - on the "woodpecker tree."

Not to say that you should never feed a mix, mind you... I use a mix strictly as something to scatter on the ground, under the bird cave and across the chiseled-flat, wooden cross bar on top of it. In fact, I purchase bags of white millet and cracked corn that I mix together with sunflower to create my own no-waste mix in a proportion of two to two to one, respectively. Doves and native sparrows suck it up like shop-vacs. Unfortunately, house sparrows (not a true sparrow, an invasive alien) are drawn to mixes too. Depending on where you live, house sparrow numbers can reach nuisance levels, often to the detriment of more desirable visitors.

In addition to sunflower and mix, provide thistle (niger seed) in a feeder with especially tiny ports for goldfinches and other finch species that in some winters may drift down from Canada. Additionally, supply suet in a mounted cage feeder to increase woodpecker abundance at the station. There are many other food items available to put out for specific birds to enjoy, but providing the short list above will entice every type of seed-eating bird that is present in any given season in your particular neighborhood.

AMBIANCE is important to a restaurant's popularity, too. *What, you ask, these pampered birds need ambiance, too?* Well, they don't need it just like human diners don't, but it may help to sway them from the competing restaurant next door.

Comfortable "seating" is important when choosing which array of feeders to go with. Many people like the clean look of hanging tube feeders over bins and platforms, but any birds, cardinal-sized or larger, are noticeably uncomfortable balancing on short perches below small ports. Doves won't even attempt it. Medium-to-large feeder birds like jays, cardinals, blackbirds and doves - plus all the sparrows - are natural ground-feeders. From their POV a firmly-mounted bin or platform is basically a piece of ground that just happens to be situated above the rest of the ground. If you wish to have only one feeder outside a window this style is your best bet to get *everybody's* attention. Just don't let the sunflower run dry.

Hanging tubes and other feeders suited to more diminutive diners definitely have their worth though, and can be critical to enticing volumes of birds. The above-mentioned feeders may be one-size-fits-all, but



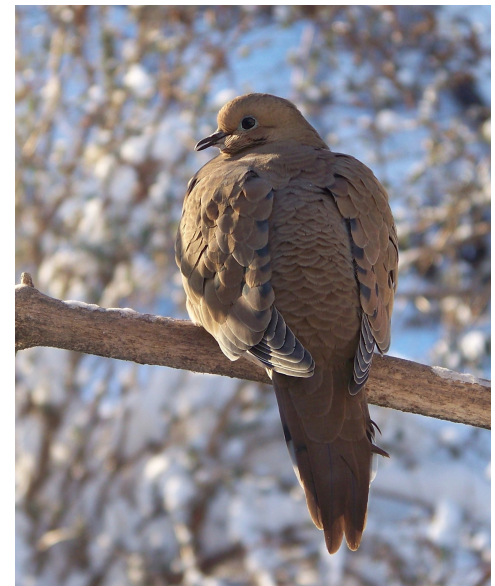
the space could easily become dominated by larger birds to the point where the more abundant smaller birds get forced out. In addition, all small birds naturally avoid close proximity to blue jays. A hanging feeder filled with sunflower or thistle acts as a “reserved table” - chickadees, titmice, nuthatches or finches only, please.

Outside the breeding season finches of many species have a strong propensity to flock. A dozen or more often descend upon the feeders, yet, the standard thistle tube accommodates only six birds. This is one reason I like the style made of aluminum window screen rolled into a tube. In contrast to only six ports, the countless openings in the fine mesh are all “ports.” Finches cling and clamor over its entire surface. In peak feeding circumstances twenty or more can cling to this feeder although it is no larger than the standard six-perch variety. Providing two such feeders may well attract *twice* as many finches. How many finches would you like? Or, to put it another way, *How much would you be willing to spend on thistle?* – the most

costly of seeds since it is grown and shipped from overseas. (In recent years we’ve pared our thistle purchases substantially in order to shrink our bird-feeding carbon footprint. Finely-ground sunflower hearts can be mixed with thistle or substituted in these feeders and still be highly-attractive to all finches.)

In addition to providing your guests comfortable “seating,” one more comfort adds greatly to the overall ambiance, and therefore, popularity of the avian eatery. Indeed, the importance of cover close to the feeding area is critical, especially in the winter, yet frequently overlooked by frustrated feeder-fillers who are receiving scant returns. I’ve thus far failed to mention that one side of our window-viewing area is dominated by a dense row of overgrown juniper shrubs. Birds of all species constantly disappear within it to rest, to get out of the elements, and to avoid marauding hawks. The bird cave acts as an extension of this cover with enhanced feeding opportunities and viewability, to boot. If you don’t have established evergreen cover near the largest or most advantageous window for a feeding station, construction of a bird cave is especially critical - the more cover, the better. After Christmas, discarded evergreen trees can be collected and arranged to provide instant cover, too.

Finally, the feeding station’s PROXIMITY TO YOUR WINDOW can’t be emphasized enough if for no other reason than this: For all your effort you might as well get the most out of it. Arrange all elements of your feeding station as close to the window as possible. Many feeders are situated in yards so far from the nearest window you can barely tell who is who. Certainly, the closer the wild bird the more observable and interesting it becomes. Young children are far more captivated by birds that land close to them. They can view them, learn to identify them and watch behaviors with ease. I am far from an accomplished photographer, but I’ve taken many high-quality, up-close photos through the window with my nifty autofocus Kodak Easyshare, including those here.



For anyone (everyone?) disillusioned by this coming winter’s forecast of isolated discontent; for parents and teachers looking to find something – anything – to supplement the tedium of a child’s online learning - how about engagement in the serious planning, construction and daily maintenance of a “birdaurant?” Educational benefits abound, not to mention the associated spark of environmental awareness and appreciation that may well last throughout the winter - and perhaps, even through a lifetime. Start now, before the snow flies. We can help.

-Jim McGrath

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Visit Our Nature Center by Appointment



Suggested Minimum Donation: \$5/person/hr



The sky's the limit for natural science learning here – with a Michigan twist! Through the duration of pandemic restrictions individual adults, couples and individual families are welcome to schedule a safe, intimate outdoor or indoor visit to what we call “The Biggest Little Nature Center in Michigan,” and “Home to the Largest Zoo of Michigan-native Reptiles and Amphibians.” The unique, in-person, hands-on experiences here are a welcome relief to a student’s screen-learning time! We will bring snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders out of tanks to interact with adults or students of any age or grade-level. Visitors are required to wear a mask during all indoor time.

Identify and feed “the grand slam of Michigan turtles” - all ten species native to our state! Meet, pet and feed “Milberta”, our always hungry Red-footed tortoise.

Handle any or all of Michigan’s three species of garter snakes while learning how to tell them apart, then watch them gobble up worms and live frogs. Hold or “wear” a gentle 6-foot Black Rat Snake – the largest in the state!

Many more snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders to identify and feed. Take a guided walk on our trails to identify birds, bugs, trees, vines, and invasive plants.

Ask about arranging weekly or monthly visits or regarding custom natural science lessons to supplement your student’s interests and grade-specific science requirements.

Contact us for additional information or to make an appointment any day.



*Arrange Your Own
Personal Powerpoint Presentation,
Making the Ultimate
Winter
Bird Feeding
Station
for Maximum Birds
& Enjoyment*



By Appointment, in Person or Remotely

Individuals, individual couples, families and small learning pods of students are invited to visit our nature center by special appointment to sit in on this original Powerpoint presentation. What's the secret to attracting the greatest abundance and variety of birds to the feeders outside your winter window? Think of them as customers at a "bird restaurant" – with you as the manager! When you consider the preferred menu of your potential guests in addition to the most comfortable "seating" and overall ambiance, you'll turn your feeding station into the squawk of the town.



Build a "Bird Cave."

The presentation traverses all aspects of attracting winter birds through the correct management of your own upscale avian eatery. Does offering a seed mix attract the most birds? Not necessarily... How does hanging only one style of feeder limit the number of visiting birds? Participants will view beautiful color images while learning the preferences and behaviors of familiar year-round backyard residents as well as a host of songbirds from the far north that would like to adopt your yard as their winter getaway. Seeds, feeders and other considerations discussed in the presentation will be available for inspection. View two birding stations outside our windows. We'll help you identify the birds that are visiting them, too.

Ask us about scheduling a REMOTE PRESENTATION via Zoom for individual households, school classrooms or other remote gatherings of interested people. Contact us to set an appointment, for donation suggestions, or for further details.

Need help constructing a "birdaurant?" We can help build one outside a choice window of your home.

Nature Discovery also offers



For instance... Arrange to head-start your own baby snapping turtle through the winter for release in the spring.

*a wide range of fun,
personalized, in-person,
hands-on natural science,
physical science and
chemistry lessons*

*to complement hybrid
learning strategies for
students of any grade.*

Contact us to discuss topics and details!



For instance... Prepare your own "museum-worthy" small mammal skull in a special lab session here.

Above: Prepared Fox Squirrel skull.

Thank you to all our supporters for generous donations that have helped keep our mission afloat through these difficult months, including the following donors in October...

Debbie & John Crump

Jan Heminger

Warren Kimball

Paula Pfeffer

Emily Schnurr

Angela Sprecher



Above: Female Evening Grosbeak. This northern migrant rarely occurs in in Lower Michigan, but this fall flocks are showing up at area feeders. Watch and listen for them now in your yard!

Arrange you own guided birding outing at a local natural area of your or our choice. Keep track of birds encountered with one of our Michigan Birds checklists. Don't have a quality pair of binoculars? We'll lend you a pair for the outing!

It's Official, U.S. is a Climate Action Pariah

While citizens have reason to fret over an autocrat wannabe's desperate attempts to steal the election results from the hands of the majority, November 4 will stand in infamy, regardless, for another reason. Against the will of the majority (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/21/how-americans-see-climate-change-and-the-environment-in-7-charts/>), he-who-shall-not-be-named will have officially absolved the U.S. from any responsibility on the world stage in taking action to battle climate change.

No Matter Who Wins, the U.S. Exits the Paris Climate Accord the Day After the Election
https://insideclimatenews.org/news/28102020/paris-climate-accord-US-exit-day-after-election?utm_source=InsideClimate+News&utm_campaign=2c004e3c8e-&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_29c928ffb5-2c004e3c8e-327904609

War on NOAA? A Climate Change Denier's Arrival Raises Fears the Agency's Climate Mission is Under Attack
<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/23102020/noaa-climate-denial-david-legates>

We saw the documentary movie, *The Way I See It*, when it aired on MSNBC in mid-October. Uplifting and hope-fueling viewing for these times! We highly recommend it for what currently troubles us - as individuals and as a nation. Here is the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L4ktHbelhc> -JM

The next generation would be justified in looking back at us and asking, "What were you thinking? Couldn't you hear what the scientists were saying? Couldn't you hear what Mother Nature was screaming at you?" -Al Gore

I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act like you would in a crisis. I want you to act like your house is on fire, because it is. -Greta Thunberg



Less Beef = Less CO₂
Cowspiracy.com

**Union of
Concerned Scientists**
Science for a healthy planet and safer world



RSPO.org



Worldwarzero.com

Become a fan of ***Nature Discovery*** on Facebook!

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