



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Volume 21 Issue 1 | January/February 2014

ALL SEASONS
WILD BIRD
STORE

Owls!

Minnesota's Species
Amazing Owl Facts



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Bird's-Eye View is published to share the joy of backyard birds with All Seasons Wild Bird Store's customers and friends.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Why is it slow at my feeders?

By Bloomington Asst. Manager TRISH WAGLE

This past autumn, many of us were not seeing the number or variety of birds that we've seen in past years. To understand why, let's examine the top 5 factors that affect activity at your feeders.

① It's all about the seed

Using quality, fresh birdseed in your feeder will always attract the widest variety of birds in the greatest number. A good seed mixture should consist mainly of black oil sunflower seeds, either in or out of the shell. You can never go wrong with our signature Joe's Mix!

Even if your feeders are full of excellent seed choices, birds may not partake when there's an abundance of natural food, especially during the fall harvest. When crops of natural foods—like cones, berries, insects and seeds—are in poor supply, you'll see a boom in birds that visit your feeder.

② Location, Location, Location

Another factor affecting bird feeding is feeder placement. While we all want to be able to see birds up close and personal, it's important to

consider placement from a bird's point of view. Place feeders near natural cover, like bushes or trees, and avoid placement in high-traffic areas. Areas close to large windows may also cause some birds to shy away.

Feeder height is also critical. Place feeders high enough to be inaccessible to predators, yet close enough so that they don't tower over birds' natural feeding habitats (approximately 5-8 ft. high). Position feeders at least 5 feet above the ground to foil predators. If deer are a problem, raise the feeder, but no higher than 10 feet.

③ Birds are Creatures of Habit

Birds are naturally cautious, so they're slow to adapt to any change in their surroundings,

(Continued on page 4...)



▲ *Wondering why your feeders don't have any takers?*

Worry-Free Guarantee!

We want our customers to have a worry-free experience with every purchase. If you're not completely satisfied with *any item* purchased from our store, simply return it to us for an exchange or refund.

No worries . . . ever!

 **Join the conversation online!**

Visit our Facebook page to post photos, ask questions and be the first to know about upcoming sales and events.

Receive exclusive email offers

Sign up for *Bird Bytes* at wildbirdstore.com and receive email coupons and electronic editions of the *Bird's-Eye View* and *Jim Gilbert's Phenology*.

Send photos of your backyard friends!

We love to show off our customers' photos on our in-store digital display. Simply email your photos to info@wildbirdstore.net.

CHIRPS

New Research on Benefits of Birdfeeding

Our business is actively involved in a multi-national trade association called the Wild Bird Feeding Industry (WBFI). The WBFI has approximately 100 member companies, ranging from small mom-and-pop retail stores to national retail chain stores and multi-national bird food packagers. It's a very diverse group and I'm fortunate to be serving as the current President of the Board of Directors. We recently held our annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, where the results of some exciting research we've sponsored was unveiled.

Dr. David Horn, Associate Professor of Biology at Millikin University, has been conducting research to determine how bird feeding impacts bird populations, health and survival. His findings so far have been very exciting for those of us who want to help wild birds survive and to enjoy their inherent beauty in our backyards.

Key findings prove that birds with access to bird feeders have:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| * Better body condition | * Higher anti-oxidant levels | * Better immune function |
| * Higher fat stores | * Better overall nutritional condition | * Higher survival rates from year to year |
| * Lower stress levels | | |

Those are amazing findings! For the first time, someone has been able to conclusively provide data to support the claim that bird feeding is good for birds. There is little doubt that providing a little supplemental food makes a giant difference for the birds in our yards.

There is more ongoing research happening on this topic and we'll provide more details as they become public, but we wanted you to know that you are helping your feathered friends in enormous ways.

~ Dave Netten

SEASONAL CHECKLIST

JAN.
&
FEB.

Mid-Winter

- Birds eat 25% more calories daily in the winter. Beef up your feeders with these high-energy foods:

- ✓ Mixes that include peanuts, like **Joe's Mix**, **Cabin Mix**, **Songbird Delight** and **Kracker Jax**
- ✓ Suet in cakes, plugs or balls in suet feeders or suet pellets mixed in with your seed
- ✓ Mealworms, live or dried

- Attract resident White-breasted Nuthatches and winter migrant Red-breasted Nuthatches with a Peanut Pickout feeder.** ▶



- Refill the heated birdbath with *cold* water. Using warm water increases water loss by evaporation and causes the thermostat to turn off until the water temperature drops.

- Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 14-17. Sign up at birdsource.org/gbbc.

- Welcome winter visiting American Tree Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos with **Finches' Choice** or **Spectrum Mix** on the ground along hedges and shrubs.



- Offer **Nyjer**® or Nyjer mixes throughout the winter for goldfinches and house finches. Goldfinches are very nomadic in the winter; abundant at the feeders one day and absent the next.

- Call the Wayzata store at 952.473.4283 for our **Home Delivery** or **Vacation Feed and Fill** service before you leave for warmer climates!

- Feed squirrels well away from your bird feeders and keep them busy with corncobs and a Squirrel Bungee or an in-shell peanut wreath feeder.** ▶



Who's Who?

MINNESOTA'S COMMON OWLS

by Wayzata Manager MELISSA BLOCK

Four owls commonly found in Minnesota are the Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Eastern Screech Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl.



Great Horned Owl

The characteristic “ear” tufts that crown these majestic birds’ heads aren’t ears at all—they’re just tufts of feathers. Like other owls, their ears are located on the side of the head. Big yellow eyes endow Great Horned Owls with a very fierce look.

Nicknamed “Flying Tigers,” since they’re one of few predators who’ll prey on skunks and porcupines, Great Horned Owls prey on birds

and animals alike. Four-legged prey—including mice, voles, squirrels and other small animals—make up 90% of their diet. Avian prey includes hawks, crows, ducks and other birds, including smaller owls.

Great Horned Owls are 18-25 inches tall and weigh 3-5 lbs. One interesting note: Great Horned Owls have very long eyelashes, which serve both sensory and protective functions.

Great Horned Owls begin nesting in January and February. The females lay 1-5 eggs in abandoned nests of squirrels, hawks or crows. The eggs hatch in 30-40 days. The newly hatched young are covered with down and don’t open their eyes until they’re 7-8 days old. The young will leave the nest in 6-9 weeks.

Barred Owl

Barred Owls are common in eastern Minnesota. They are smaller than Great Horned Owls and lack “ear” tufts. Barred Owls are the only owl species in the northland with dark instead of yellow eyes. They’re a medium-sized grayish-brown bird with a dark outline around the face and light brown stripes on the chest. Barred Owls are typically 17-20 inches tall and weigh 1-2 lbs. Their characteristic call sounds like



“who cooks for you . . . who cooks for you all.”

Barred Owls nest in March—a bit later than the Great Horned Owl. They nest in hollow trees, abandoned nests of other animals or in nest boxes. The female lays 2-3 eggs that hatch after 30 days. Young leave the nest in 4-5 weeks.



Northern Saw-Whet Owl

Northern Saw-whet Owls are commonly found in central and northern Minnesota. Their name is inspired by their call, which sounds like a saw being sharpened (*whet* is a pioneer word meaning *sharpened*). At 7-8 inches tall and 2-5 oz., these small birds appear to have a disproportionately large head with big yellow eyes, making them arguably one of the most

adorable birds of prey.

Saw-whet Owls are forest birds that eat mostly mice, shrews and chipmunks. During the day they like to roost in evergreen trees, 10-12 feet up, close to the trunk.

Northern Saw-whet Owls nest from March to July in tree holes and cavities. The female lays 5-6 eggs that are incubated for 3-4 weeks. Young leave the nest in 4-5 weeks.

Eastern Screech Owl

Eastern Screech Owls are small, gray or reddish owls with small “ear” tufts. Often heard more than seen, their call is an eerie descending trilling or whinnying sound.

Eastern Screech Owls are 6-10 inches tall and weigh 4-8 oz. They’re birds of the woods that prefer to live near water. Most of their diet consists of mice, shrews, moles, chipmunks, large insects and an occasional snake.

Screech Owls nest between mid-March to mid-May. Rather than build a nest, they use tree holes or cavities made by woodpeckers or squirrels. The female lays 2-6 eggs and incubates them for 3-4 weeks. Young leave the nest after 3-4 weeks. ■



AMAZING OWL FACTS

Vision

Owls’ eyes are fixed in their sockets facing forward, giving them remarkable depth perception compared to other birds. Since their eyes don’t move, they rotate their heads—an astonishing 270 degrees! The anatomical structure of owls’ eyes, plus the density and type of light-gathering cells in the retina gives owls the ability to see long distances in low light.

Hearing

Owls’ ears are located on the sides of their heads, concealed by feathers. Their facial disc feathers are arranged in a parabola shape that excellently collects and directs sound waves to their ears. Owls’ ears are offset, one higher than the other, which allows them to accurately pinpoint the location of a sound.

Silent Flight

Owls have specialized feathers adapted to provide them with acoustic stealth when sneaking up on prey. Serrated leading edge wing feathers, “tattered” trailing edge wing feathers and velvety, down feathers on their wing surfaces and legs greatly reduce the noisy turbulence typically created by flapping wings.

Why is it slow at my feeders?

(... Continued from page 1) including new feeders or seed. It can take birds 4–6 weeks to adapt to any changes in your feeding station. Try placing a new feeder close to a popular existing one, perhaps even letting the old feeder go empty to force birds to try the new one. Be patient and try not to change too much too fast!

④ Backyard Hazards

Predators can cause a sudden absence of feeder birds in the backyard. Common predators include hawks, cats, foxes and coyotes. Fluctuations in predator populations will have an inverse effect on your bird population.

Place feeders close enough to shrubs or bushes so birds can take cover, but not so close that predators, like cats, can lie in

wait. While you're at it, encourage neighbors to keep cats inside.

The effect of a predator can be temporary and localized. When Blue Jays sound their alarm, smaller birds will temporarily flee or, in rare cases, freeze in place until the danger passes. When the predators move on, your feeder birds return.

⑤ Weather-Induced Changes

Drought, floods, storms, temperature extremes and unusual weather conditions affect bird migration and breeding. National and local weather patterns can shed light on the question, *what happened to the birds?*

For example, just this past spring, we had cold weather well into June, producing a shorter nesting period and perhaps fewer successful broods. The effect of this

shortened nesting period may ripple for several seasons.

On a shorter time scale, watch your feeder next time you suspect rain; bird behavior will forecast the impending weather change loud and clear.

These are just a few factors affecting the birds at your feeder. Others may include habitat change or disease. Try to make observations from your yard, your neighborhood and your region to get a bigger picture as to how bird populations are faring. Other birders may be helpful as well. At least you'll know that you aren't alone in missing your birds. Don't worry . . . they'll be back! ■

FEATURED PRODUCTS

Intriguing Owls

Exceptional Images and Insights



This book is a collection of beautiful images and insights by local author and photographer, **Stan Tekiela**. He's observed owls for over 20 years and this is a compilation of his photos and insights.

▲ [Intriguing Owls book](#)

Recycled Suet & Seed Block Feeder

Holds 3-lb. Suet or Large Seed Block

Think big for winter! A great new feeder to try is the **Recycled Seed & Suet Block feeder**. It has a large, coated metal cage topped with a green roof to keep a 3-lb. suet or large seed block dry throughout the snowy winter season. A taupe base provides perching space for larger birds such as cardinals, as well as catching seed or suet that might otherwise fall. The feeder is made of recycled poly lumber, which is guaranteed against peeling, cracking or fading. To fill, simply tilt the roof to one side. Installation is a snap because the feeder comes with a sturdy



▲ [Recycled Suet and Seed Block feeder](#)

hanging cable—that should hold those birds for a while! Cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers and many other songbirds gather on the circular tray.

Birds Choice™ Peanut Pick-Outs Feeder

Supply A High-Energy Treat

The **Birds Choice™ Stainless Steel Peanut Pick-Outs Feeder** is made from durable stainless steel with a quick-release bottom for easy cleaning. This feeder holds 1 qt. (about 1 lb.) of Peanut Pick-Outs. Enjoy watching birds cling to the metal cylinder and peck out peanut pieces. Optional 9"-diameter metal tray. Attracts chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers and maybe even a Brown Creeper! ■



▲ [Pick-Outs Feeder](#)

NUTHATCH TRIVIA

- ✧ The Red-breasted Nuthatch is smaller than the White-breasted Nuthatch. Both have blue-gray backs but the Red-breasted is distinguished by its rufous/rusty breast and underparts as well as the black "racing stripe" through its eye.
- ✧ Pioneers referred to nuthatches as "the topsy turvy birds."

Have an idea for a future issue of *Birds-Eye View*? Photos and articles may be submitted by email to info@wildbirdstore.net. Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter at WildBirdStore.com to receive information about backyard birding, store events and exclusive discounts.