

Mecklenburg Audubon Society

Backyard Notes: Water, Water Everywhere

But is there a drop to drink in your backyard? People [myself included] spend a lot of money buying bird feeders, birdseed, suet and a host of other 'things' to attract birds to their backyards. However, they overlook the most cost effective ingredient necessary to lure birds -WATER!

You may have noticed during the summer birds don't eat as much from the feeders. There's plenty of natural food [seeds, berries, bugs] to keep their tummies filled. On the other hand, hot, sunny weather creates a different type of crisis for the birds - drought. And although we tend to think of drought as being a summer phenomenon, lack of water can be a problem anytime of the year.

If you don't have a water source in your yard you are probably missing a lot of birds. It is the single most important factor in attracting new species of birds to a yard. And it doesn't take very much money to make the birds happy.

I don't have an elaborate set up - just a few shallow containers [upside down garbage can lids will do] scattered around the yard filled with water. But it's at these watering holes that I am see the most birds. I hear Cedar Waxwings in my trees and I see them flying from tree to tree, but



rarely do I get to see them up-close and personal like the cardinals or finches. However, several appeared at one of the recently filled birdbaths in the yard. They were having a grand time drinking and bathing in an old kitty litter container that I have filled with rocks. I could see their markings in detail without binoculars. While I was watching them a Yellow-rumped Warbler joined them.

There are numerous types of birdbaths, from the very basic puddle of water on the ground to elaborate sculptured baths and fountains. When constructing or purchasing a birdbath, there are two important features to look for: 1) edges should slope gradually (most birds will not use a bath that drops off sharply on the sides) and 2) surfaces should have a rough texture for sure footing (verses slippery surfaces such as plastic and smooth concrete). If your container seems a little deep, add gravel and/or rocks. This will also provide a rough, natural surface for the birds.

Put your bath either on the ground, on a pedestal within 15 or 20 feet of quick cover or under a tree. A wet bird cannot make a quick a getaway. Birds also seem to like a little privacy, so having a few small shrubs or grasses to shield them from a keen hawk's eye is helpful.

Add moving water, if at all possible. A dripper can be made by putting a tiny [and I mean tiny] hole in a plastic milk jug and suspending it over a bird bath dish. It's the noise that is important. The water doesn't have to move very far. A mister, dripper, or circulating pump added to a birdbath or pool of fresh water



can add just the right sound to attract wild birds.

Water should be available all year. Heaters are only necessary if the water is frozen. Birds are use to drinking cold water in the winter.

Finally remember to keep the water supply as clean as possible. During the summer algae can become a problem. Do a quick wash with a little Clorox water. Let it dry thoroughly and then fill it again. In the fall keeping leaves out is probably the biggest problem.

In short, think of how many times you've observed wild birds happily flapping about in a mud puddle. Try to recreate that experience for them in your backyard.

