

Mecklenburg Audubon Society

Backyard Notes: Year-round Feeding

Summer Feeding

Many people think once they put up their hummingbird feeders they should take down their other feeders. That's not really necessary though. Feeding birds in the summer can be a very rewarding endeavor. Although you might not have as wide a variety of species (I have counted as many as 28 species at one time in the winter) you will be surprised at who does show up.

It is true birds tend to switch to a diet that includes more insects during the summer. And there is a wider variety of natural foods available. However, birds are like people, they like the convenience of fast food. Especially when they are trying to fledge their offspring. Watching cardinals, titmice, chickadees and even finches bring their progeny into the feeder is a real delight. It is fascinating to watch the variety of behaviors that unfolds through the summer.

There are a couple things you need to keep in mind if you feed through the summer. It is very important to keep the feeders clean. The warmer temperatures can promote disease if feeders aren't cleaned regularly. Also keep the area under the feeders relatively clean. Some people switch to seed that has already been hulled to eliminate the debris under the feeders. If you want to continue to provide

suet for the woodpeckers make sure you get the kind made for summer use. Providing



fruit such as oranges and apples may bring a few species such as orioles and tanager which would not frequent the seed feeder. Even if you choose not to feed birds in the summer, remember to provide a good supply of water which will entice a wide variety of birds to your yard.

Which ever you do (feed, water or both), once the spring migration has past and the warmer days of summer have settled in, you can sit back in your air conditioning and watch the birds in your backyard work hard at raising their young.

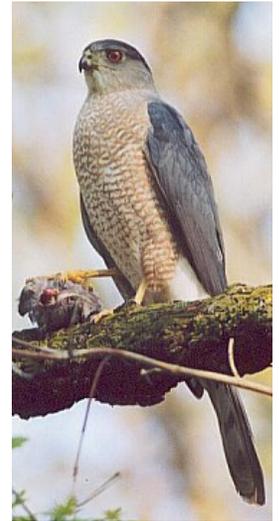
Feeding All the Birds

The other day I found a feather on my driveway. With all the birds coming and going from the feeders and pond in my yard this isn't an uncommon find. However, as I studied the feather I realized this wasn't any ordinary feather belonging to a dove or cardinal. It was a hawk feather. A Sharp-shinned Hawk feather to be precise.

The feather reminded me that when I decided to feed birds I couldn't be picky about exactly which birds showed up. Sure I avoid using cracked corn to discourage cowbirds and grackles but they still periodically show up and I don't chase them away. One doesn't necessarily think of a hawk as a feeder bird though.

However, to a Sharp-shinned or Cooper's Hawk my feeder is equivalent to a McDonalds or any other fast food joint. The feeders bring a lot of birds into a relatively small area. A lot of birds means easy pickings for a hungry hawk. In fact many believe the increase in backyard feeders has facilitated the urbanization of the Cooper's

Hawk. More and more Cooper's Hawks are being reported in suburban and urban settings.



On several occasions I have startled an accipiter in my backyard. The first was a sharpie after a dove. Last summer it was an immature Cooper's sitting in an oak surveying the land. I have never seen one actually catch a bird though. And that both excites me and troubles me. I understand my backyard is part of the wild kingdom where predators and prey exist in a delicate balance. The predator helps keep the prey populations healthy and vice versa. Seeing that delicate balance played out in my own yard is fascinating.

However, there is something in me that wants to protect MY birds. And there are a few things that can be done to give the prey at least a fighting chance. Feeder placement is the key. You want to place feeders in somewhat open area so birds can see an avian predator coming. At the same time you want to have some cover near by so the birds have some place to escape to when the hawk makes a dive.

I have to remember a hawk's life is hard. Seed and suet don't move around much. A bird is a moving target so a hawk has to work for its food and 80 percent of the time they are not successful. So I will continue to welcome all avian feeders to my backyard and take solace in knowing my wild kingdom will continue with all its citizens.