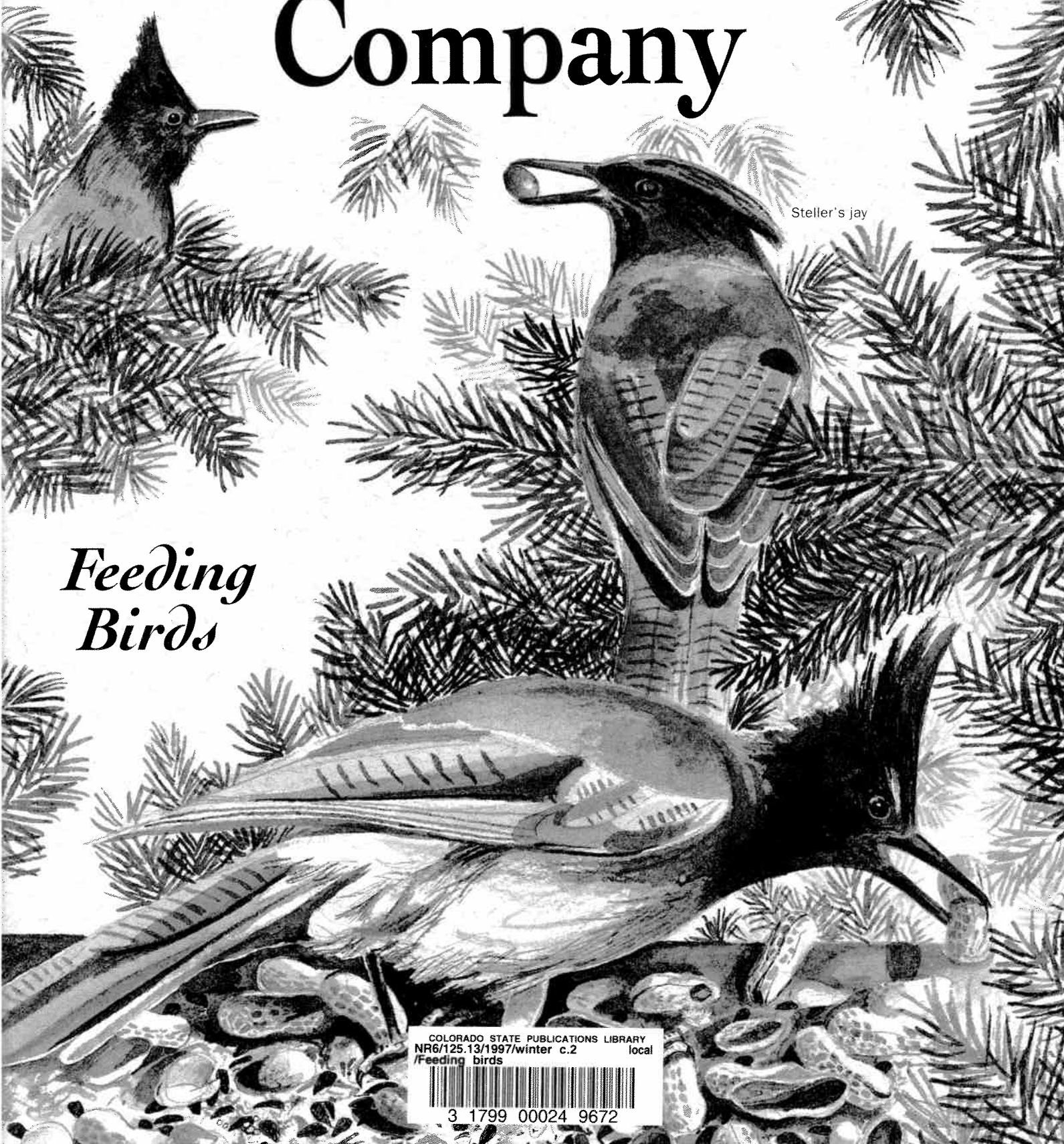


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1997 WINTER COMPENDIUM OF WILDLIFE APPRECIATION



Colorado's Wildlife Company



Steller's jay

Feeding Birds

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RESPONSIBLE BIRDFEEDING:

Being A Good Host

by Mary Taylor Gray

When a hushed snow falls and all the world seems silent and white, there's one place that's bustling with activity—the birdfeeder. The frenzied activity at the feeder demonstrates just how important supplemental food can be for songbirds when the weather turns cold. And while the energy, activity and sheer sense of vitality generated by a busy birdfeeder are a joy, the pleasure of feeding birds also carries responsibilities.

An estimated 840,000 Coloradans feed wild birds. Colorado law prohibits the feeding of big game animals such as elk and deer, but not the feeding of songbirds, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife supports and promotes birdfeeding. "Feeding birds at a feeder is a wonderful way to enjoy and learn about wildlife," says Bob Hernbrode, coordinator for DOW's Watchable Wildlife program.

Opponents to feeding claim it interferes with the birds' normal foraging for wild food, disrupts migration patterns and makes songbirds dependent upon humans. But studies of the feeding patterns of backyard birds show that, like any wisely-run business, birds don't depend on just one source of supply and any particular feeding station provides no more than 25% of their food. If they lose a bird feeder as a food source, birds quickly search out wild foods to replace it.

It's unlikely supplemental feeding keeps birds from migrating. Studies show that shortening day length, not food availability, is the main migration trigger for birds. Birds also migrate in late summer and fall when natural foods are abundant, so it's unlikely feeders sway the choice to stay or go.

Birds obviously benefit from feeding, but there are rewards for the creature providing the food as well. For many city-dwellers, backyard birds are their only connection to nature. Comments from people who feed birds often reveal a strong personal attachment, aesthetic reward and sense of responsibility associated with birdfeeding: "The birds are so beautiful and full of life, I get such joy from seeing them." "I feel as if they're all my friends." "They need me. I have to be sure to keep the feeders full



or the birds might starve." "If the feeder is empty the birds land on the deck railing and look in the window as if they're saying, 'Where's the food?'" "My birds know me. When I go out to fill the feeders they all show up and wait in the bushes."

Avian ecologists agree that food supply is a major factor in winter survival among songbirds. When the mercury drops, songbirds must stoke up their furnaces. Survival is a day-to-day battle. A study in the 1940s found that at 5°F, house sparrows could survive about 15 hours without eating—the length of a winter night. To make up for the night's deficit, and store up for the coming night, small birds must feed every day. Any difficulty finding food can be critical. Supplemental food from feeders may make the difference between surviving the winter or perishing. If someone chooses to stop feeding, it's best to taper off gradually instead of stopping abruptly so the birds have time to find new sources to make up for the lost feeder.

Traditional birdfeeding wisdom dictated putting feeders up in fall and taking them down again in spring. But birdfeeding expert Dr. Aelred Geis found that spring and early summer are times when seed-eating birds feed heavily at feeders. This is when they are courting, defending territories, nesting and

rearing young, yet the trees, shrubs and flowers are just budding and blossoming. Wild foods are most abundant in late summer and fall when seed and nut crops come in. The current wisdom on feeding is to continue year-round or, if you want a few months off, don't quit before mid-summer, then resume again in late fall just as the cold weather arrives.

Situate feeders in an open area with trees or shrubs nearby to provide shelter and cover. Don't locate a feeder where it is exposed to strong winter winds or near landscaping that could provide hiding places for cats. Cat predation is a tremendous threat to songbird populations. A University of Wisconsin biologist estimated that free-ranging domestic cats (pets and feral) kill a minimum of 3.25 million birds in that state alone during the nesting season. This figure accounts for 9 percent of Wisconsin's summer bird population (on agricultural land). In 1992, Virginia researchers estimated more than a million free-ranging cats killed at least 3 million birds each year in that state. Cat predation is not a natural part of nature as these predators are generally fed by humans, therefore not subject to the pressures faced by true wild predators. Bells around a cat's neck are ineffective in protecting birds, which don't associate the sound with danger. The only real solution is for cat-owners to keep their animals inside.



downy woodpecker

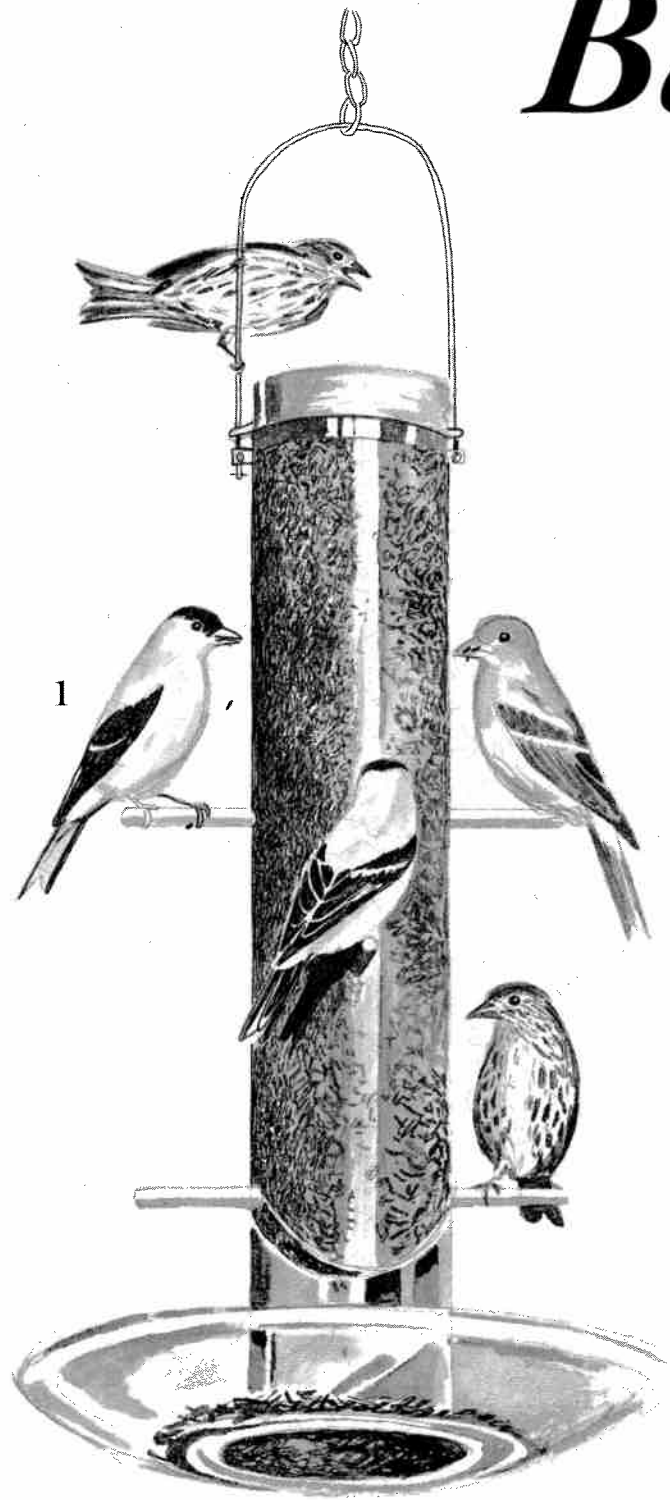
Keeping squirrels away from feeders is a constant battle, with solutions ranging from baffles to relocating feeders, but some other unwanted visitors, such as bears and deer, can present more serious problems. Since bears are mainly nocturnal around human habitation, take feeders down at night. A deer in the yard is charming the first time, but deer can devour landscaping like antlered lawnmowers. To circumvent hungry deer, hang feeders where they can't be reached. Taking feeders down for a few weeks may discourage pests; if not, you may have to quit feeding permanently.

Keeping feeding stations clean is very important. Feeders gather birds in unnaturally high concentrations. Several diseases, among them salmonellosis and avian pox, can be easily transmitted among birds at feeders so it's important to clean feeders regularly with soap, water and a brush, rinsing with a dilute bleach solution and then plain water. Keep the waste shells cleaned up so they aren't a breeding ground for viruses, bacteria and fungi. Offering numerous feeders spaced several feet apart controls crowding. An occasional dead bird is probably not an issue, but if you notice several dead ones at once, or find dead birds around your feeder frequently, quit feeding for a while to disperse the birds. Thoroughly clean your feeding station, including feeders, baths and ground areas. Not feeding for two to four weeks will disperse the birds and dry out areas that might be harboring the disease organisms.

Birdfeeding is fun and rewarding, and it has significant economic impacts as well. In 1991, sales of commercially-prepared bird food reached \$625.7 million nationwide, and participation in birdfeeding has boomed since then. An estimated 63 million Americans feed birds. To serve this market, more than 360 franchise stores sell supplies to feed birds, including such chains as Wild Birds Unlimited and Wild Bird Centers. The sale of birdseed (not including feeders and other items) is an \$18 million business in Colorado.

Feeding birds the right way takes some effort but being a good host at the birdfeeder pays off. We offer our avian guests a few seeds, and in return they bring us beauty, activity and a little bit of the natural world.

A Banquet For Birds



Thistle feeders have very tiny openings to prevent spillage of this expensive seed. Also called niger seed, this tiny caraway seed-sized food is not related to wild thistle, but it attracts the same thistle-eating birds—goldfinches, pine siskins and other small finches. Some thistle feeders are just bags made of netting.

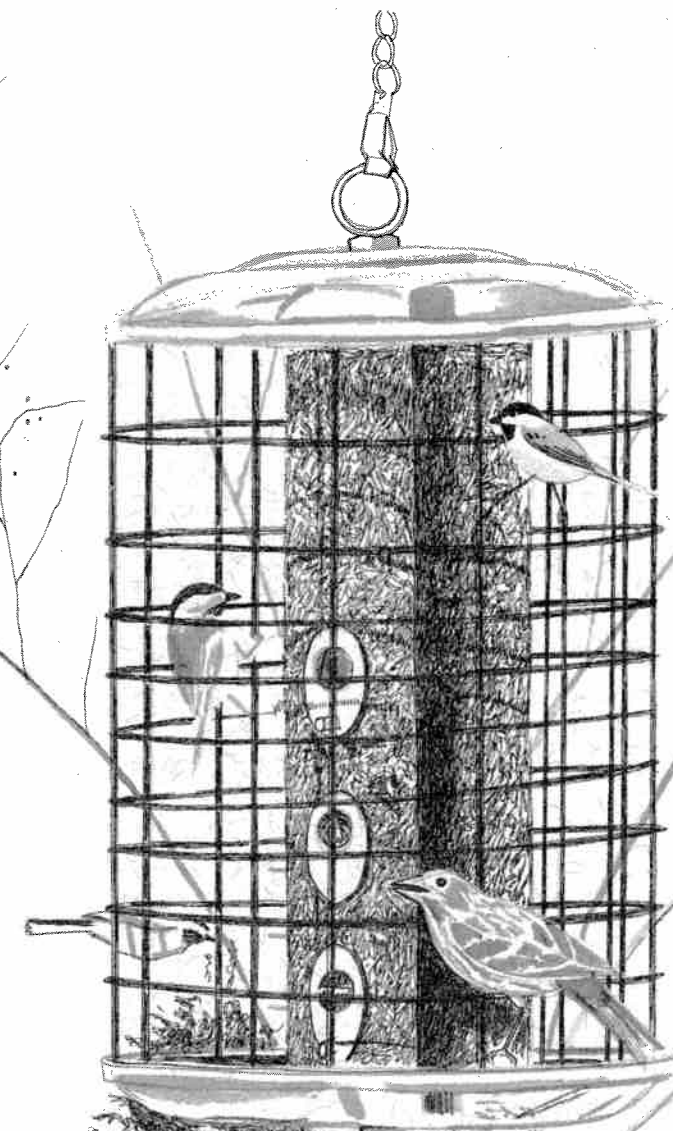
Bird Identification

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| American goldfinch - 1 | hairy woodpecker - 6 |
| pine siskin - 2 | mourning dove - 7 |
| dark-eyed junco - 3 | evening grosbeak - 8 |
| black-capped chickadee - 4 | house finch - 9 |
| white-breasted nuthatch - 5 | white-crowned sparrow - 10 |

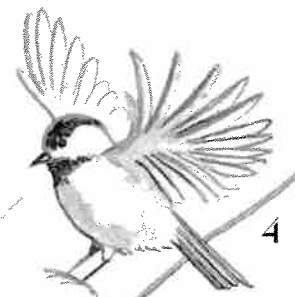
Suet feeders offer suet, or animal fat, as a high-energy food for insect-eating birds like downy and hairy woodpeckers, flickers, chickadees and nuthatches. Suet is especially important in winter when



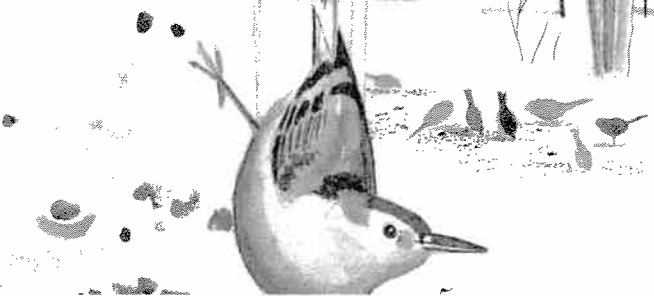
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Mixed-seed feeders can take many forms. Among the most popular are tube feeders, with several ports equipped with perches, and hopper feeders, essentially a seed bin with a tray attached for the birds to feed from. These feeders hold seed mixes which can include millet, sunflower seed and safflower. They may attract house finches, house sparrows, grosbeaks, black-birds, chickadees, grackles, jays and many other birds.



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FEEDING NOTES...

Wild birds are selective in their food choices. Studies have found that white (or yellow) proso millet and black oil sunflower are very attractive to a great variety of birds. Red millet and striped sunflower have tougher shells and are harder for small birds to open. Check the content of any seed mixes you buy. Cheap mixes contain fillers like milo, wheat groats and rapeseed that go to waste because songbirds won't eat them.

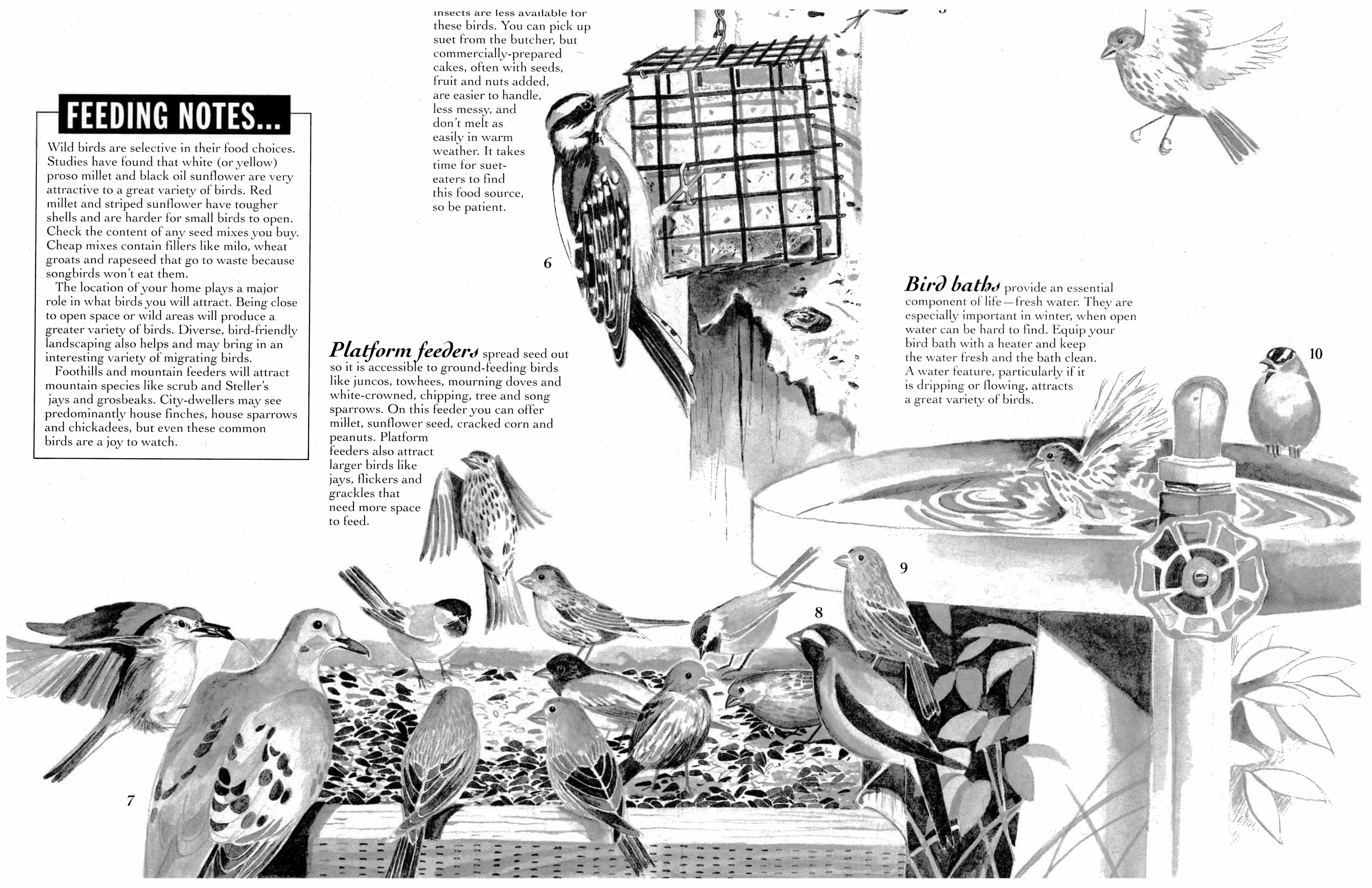
The location of your home plays a major role in what birds you will attract. Being close to open space or wild areas will produce a greater variety of birds. Diverse, bird-friendly landscaping also helps and may bring in an interesting variety of migrating birds.

Foothills and mountain feeders will attract mountain species like scrub and Steller's jays and grosbeaks. City-dwellers may see predominantly house finches, house sparrows and chickadees, but even these common birds are a joy to watch.

insects are less available for these birds. You can pick up suet from the butcher, but commercially-prepared cakes, often with seeds, fruit and nuts added, are easier to handle, less messy, and don't melt as easily in warm weather. It takes time for suet-eaters to find this food source, so be patient.

Platform feeders spread seed out so it is accessible to ground-feeding birds like juncos, towhees, mourning doves and white-crowned, chipping, tree and song sparrows. On this feeder you can offer millet, sunflower seed, cracked corn and peanuts. Platform feeders also attract larger birds like jays, flickers and grackles that need more space to feed.

Bird baths provide an essential component of life—fresh water. They are especially important in winter, when open water can be hard to find. Equip your bird bath with a heater and keep the water fresh and the bath clean. A water feature, particularly if it is dripping or flowing, attracts a great variety of birds.



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by Mary Taylor Gray

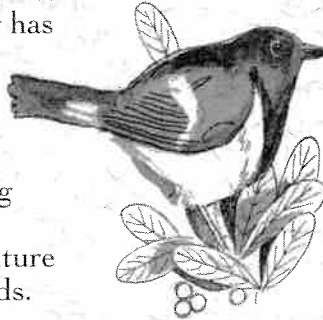
JAVA JIVE:

Helping Birds By What You Eat

As you sip your morning coffee to the bright chirps of songbirds at your feeders, you probably never realized the connection between your feathered friends and your cup of java. One-third of North American migratory birds spend winter in coffee-growing areas of Latin America. But coffee country is not always bird-friendly as intensive coffee farming destroys wintering habitat for birds.

Coffee has traditionally been grown beneath a shade canopy of fruit and other trees. The tree canopy supports an ecosystem of microorganisms, plants and animals and offers cover and food for songbirds. Probably 75% of specialty coffees, those higher priced beans you grind yourself, are still grown on shaded plantations. But specialty coffees are less than 20% of the coffee market. Your average brand of canned grocery store coffee is grown in full sun on "technified" plantations where the shade canopy has been cut. Exposed to the sun, the coffee bushes grow fast and produce high yields, as much as four times the beans of shaded bushes. But full-sun growing requires heavy use of fertilizers and pesticides. This coffee-tree monoculture supports perhaps five species of birds.

American
redstart



By contrast, studies show as many as 150 bird species utilize the shade canopy of traditional coffee plantations. With forests and fruit trees

now removed from almost half the coffee-growing regions of Latin America, millions of familiar backyard songbirds, including warblers, thrushes, orioles and hummingbirds, are potentially threatened.

Few shade-grown coffees are marked as such in stores, so presently the most reliable guideline to buying them is to choose organic coffee. Not all shade-grown coffee is grown organically, but most organic coffees are grown in the shade, since it's almost impossible to get a crop in full sun without application of chemicals. Natural food groceries carry organic coffees, and the Wild Birds Unlimited stores now carry Song Bird Coffee, a line of high quality coffees specifically identified as shade-grown and bird-friendly.

Buying shade-grown coffee isn't totally for the birds. Coffee grows more slowly in the shade, allowing the formation of more complex starches in the coffee bean, hence richer, more complex flavor. So coffee lovers can help birds without sacrificing that rich, satisfying coffee flavor. Ahh!

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