

Feeding the Birds

October 28, 2024

When I was a kid, my mother taught me to identify the common birds. No one I knew thought to actually feed them though. Maybe this is a more 'modern' phenomenon.

I'm trying to remember if I fed the birds at my early houses, but I can't remember ever doing that. We certainly had bird feeders out when we lived by Lake Wisconsin. We attracted all the common birds but nothing exotic except for a very lost Pacific Coast humming bird. When we first moved to up there to our bluff, there were no turkeys anywhere in central Wisconsin. (Hard to imagine now!) When they started to show up, one of our neighbors called the DNR to thank them for stocking them but they hadn't. They had released some turkeys at Devil's Lake State Park. We think they came over the frozen river to our area and spread from there. Clearly they have been very successful.

We didn't feed the turkeys but we did put out several feeders. That was often a challenge in the winter because I remember wading through hip-deep snow to fill feeders.

Currently, feeders have become common. We have several feeders on our deck, hanging from the eaves, plus seeds on a small round table and a heated birdbath for drinking water and bathing.

Bird feeding has created several challenges for us. First, there is providing seeds for ground feeders. Tossing the feed on the ground does not work because it is quickly vacuumed up by the chipmunks. We solved this by

putting the seeds up on the table, strategically positioned so the vaulting chipmunks couldn't leap from the deckchairs onto it to scarf up the seeds.

However, the raccoons thought those seeds were set out as a banquet for them. First they tipped the table over to get to those seeds, so Bob put a large weight on the base. That worked for the table base but unfortunately the table top is just balanced on top of the base, easily slid off onto the floor. No solution for that yet except just not having seeds out there at night.

Then there are those hanging feeders, safely out of reach of the raccoons, or so we thought. The feeder without a dome toping seemed to be very popular with the birds and needed filling more often than the others. Then one day the feeder was missing. Bob found it up on the roof. The raccoons had been reaching the feeder over the edge of the roof and flipping it up. There they were eating the seeds and then flipping it back down. Then one day they forgot to return the feeder to its position. Busted! Bob added a wire from the siding to the feeder so it can't be flipped up any more. Ah ha! Foiled. But did that stop the raids? No. The brilliant mother raccoon learned to position her young under the feeder and then climb up onto the roof and shake the feeder so seeds rained down to her hungry young. Now I have switched to filling the feeder with hot pepper covered seeds which no mammals like. This has finally worked. However the seed mix is not as popular with the birds, which is the whole point of the project. It has proved to be very popular with red-bellied woodpeckers, so not a complete loss.

I'm sure we will continue feeding the birds as long as we have an appropriate space. It is such a joy sitting and watching them as they jockey for position at the feeders. So many varieties – ever changing and entertaining.