



Point Blue
Conservation
Science

Feeding Birds Safely:

Important Information about Bird Feeders

Before you invest in a bird feeder and bird food, consider using native plant species as natural feeders on your land. Improving your backyard habitat with birds in mind will attract more and different birds over the long term, benefit bird populations for the future, and help keep common birds common. For more information, please visit Point Blue's website at www.pointblue.org/resources and the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat website at www.nwf.org/backyard.



Song Sparrow by Zac Denning

If you do feed birds, please avoid feeding predators and parasites of birds and follow the guidelines on this handout. For additional information on bird feeding see the webpage for Project Feederwatch, a joint research and education project of Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada, at <http://feederwatch.org>.

Safe Bird Feeding Tips

- Put feeders in **Cat Free Zones**. If you have outdoor cats in your neighborhood, do not attract birds. Domestic cats are excellent hunters and will kill birds. Visit www.abcbirds.org/cats for more information.
- **Do not feed the Two Ps : Predators & Parasites**. Don't feed songbird predators (jays, crows, ravens, squirrels, cats) or their nest parasites (Brown-headed Cowbirds). Feeding the *Two Ps* can create an unbalanced ecosystem, which can increase nest failure among birds—a major cause of bird population decline.
 - 1) Watch your feeder closely to detect unwanted visitors;
 - 2) Remove your feeder if you have a high number of predators;
 - 3) Cover compost piles and pet food dishes to avoid attracting high numbers of native and non-native predators (cats, skunks, raccoons);
 - 4) Avoid feeding peanuts, a favorite food of jays, and millet, a favorite food of Brown-headed Cowbirds.
- **Keep track of birds at your feeder(s)**. Contribute your data to Project Feederwatch (see above for the website link). Remember, an unwatched feeder may be feeding songbird predators or nest parasites.
- **Offer quality food and avoid mixes with lots of millet** (to discourage cowbirds).
- **Scrape and scrub out feeders regularly (1 time per week)** with a 1:9 bleach:water solution to prevent the spread of avian diseases. Watch for signs of disease (growth on feet and bills). Wash and remove feeders for a few weeks if diseased birds are observed at your feeder.

Hummingbird Feeder Safety

- Please **do not use artificially colored solutions**, as they have been linked with birth and hatching abnormalities in hummingbirds.
- **Maintain your hummingbird feeder**. Hummingbirds can contract diseases from dirty feeders. Clean your feeder - every time you fill it (every 3 to 5 days) - with a mild solution of dishwashing liquid and hot water, using a bottle brush and toothbrush to really clean out the crevices. Refill your feeder if it's cloudy (likely every several days in hot, humid weather).
- **Filling your feeder**. Use a 1:4 sugar: water solution (e.g., 1 cup sugar + 4 cups water). Boil briefly, then store in a refrigerator until needed. Hummingbirds need consistently filled stations; if you go away a lot, do not keep a feeder.
- **Dealing with insect and ant visitors**. Smear a little mineral oil on the hanging wire to keep bees, wasps and ants at bay.