

Identification

A field guide will aid in identification of your visitors. Several guides, most pocket-sized, are available in many bookstores. Most are reasonably priced; you only need to decide on one that fits your personal preference. Two or more may be helpful for cross-referencing.

Field Glasses

Although not necessary, a set of field glasses greatly enhances the hobby of bird-watching. Much material is available on field glasses as are brands and designs. It is advisable to spend a bit more money for quality glasses as poor optics may cause undue eyestrain and displeasure.

Most bird-watchers keep a record of sightings. A "life list" is a record of dates, locations and names of birds seen. Also recorded is the time of day, weather conditions, even unusual circumstances.

Placement of Feeders

Placing your feeding station near a picture window is the first step toward successful bird-watching. Although placement should allow high visibility for you, it should also allow a good measure of privacy for the birds.

Noises from dogs, driveway traffic and heavy use of the side door should be avoided. Use a location that is as quiet and undisturbed as possible. It's a good idea to set the feeder back several yards from the window so that indoor disturbances, such as people walking back and forth, will not scare the birds off.

Normally a corner of the yard near some shrubs or a fence serves very well. The bushes permit a social arena where birds may light, preen, search for food and maintain pecking order. Where your yard meets deciduous trees and where the shrubbery ends and a garden begins all serve as mini-habitat. These areas offer the interspersing of plants and perches that birds love to utilize.

Keep Those Feeders and Feeding Stations Clean!

As birds congregate around feeders, they can leave behind disease-carrying organisms in their droppings or other secretions. The diseases can contaminate the feeders and any unaten bird seed on the ground. Other birds eating at contaminated feeders can then become infected with these diseases unless you take a few precautions to keep the feeders and the ground around them clean.

Clean your bird feeders once a month with a solution of one part chlorine bleach and nine parts of water. Let the solution come in contact with all surfaces for a few minutes and then let them air dry.

Avoid using feeders with sharp edges or rough surfaces; these can cause cuts or scratches in birds that viruses and bacteria can enter. Use more than one feeder around your home so that birds will be dispersed rather than concentrated in one place. Also, avoid letting food waste accumulate on the ground around the feeder area. Rake it periodically, or let the feeder stand idle for awhile to prevent disease transmission.

Create Habitat That Attracts More Birds

Habitat is the place that provides an animal with all of the elements it needs to survive and reproduce, and a habitat must have adequate food, water and shelter to be considered "suitable." The easiest way to provide both food and shelter to birds in your yard is to plant a variety of flowers, shrubs, and trees that produce different types of seeds, berries, and other fruits during the course of a year. Add a simple water source such as a bird bath or small shallow pool. Creating good habitat increases the chances that birds will nest during the summer, and you'll be helping out other wildlife as well.

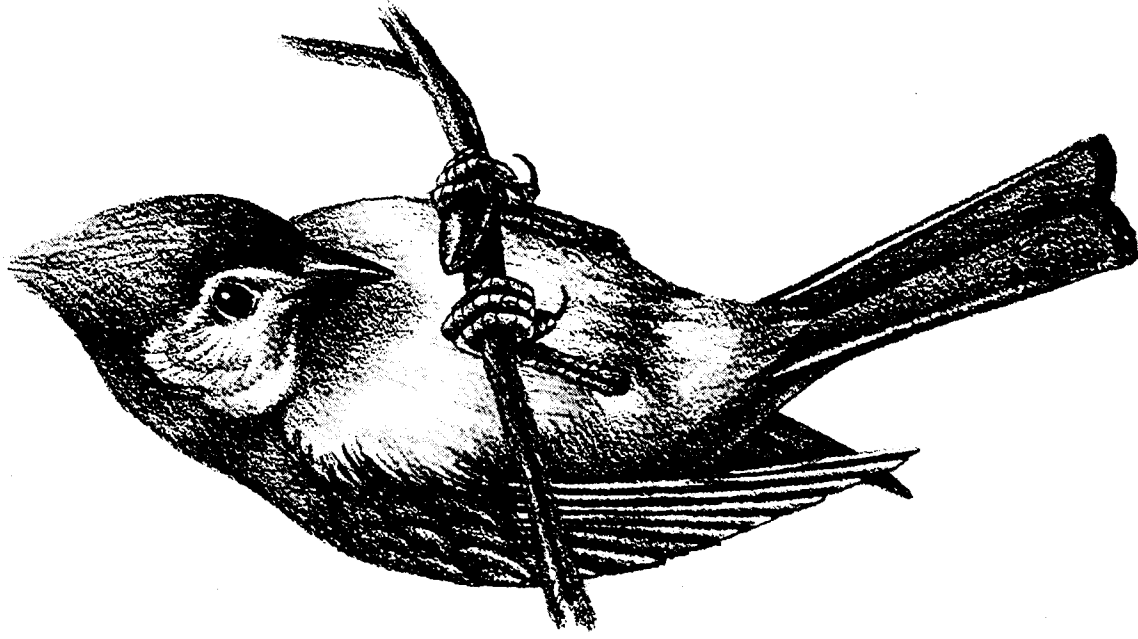
Support Your Wildlife Resources

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' mission is to manage wildlife populations; to provide opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, and boating; and to promote safety in boating, hunting, and fishing activities. These responsibilities are made possible through hunting and fishing license sales, federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing gear, boat registrations, and contributions to the Nongame Wildlife Fund by individuals like you. Individual contributions can be made by checking off the Nongame Wildlife Fund block on your state income tax return. Your generous support of Virginia's wildlife resources helps continue the Department's research and management of wildlife populations and habitats.

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Guide to Feeding Wild Birds



Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
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Evening Grosbeak

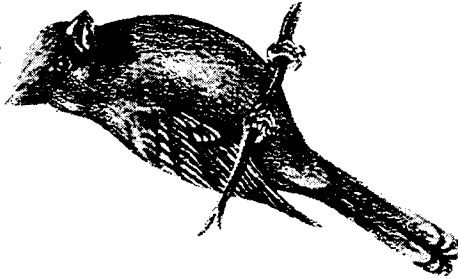
This unmistakable golden yellow and white bird is a highlight for many people who feed birds. Using an exclusive diet of *sunflower seeds*, this winter visitor lights in loose groups and often flies on after a short visit.

The grosbeaks are very attractive as they feed from tube-type feeders filled with sunflowers but will dine from platform and traditional hopper-type stations.

Cardinal

Our state bird, as well as year-round resident, the cardinal is a favorite of many. Another bird that favors *sunflower seeds* and will also relish *millet* (red and white proso) and *peanuts*.

Once cardinals are established at feeding stations, you can depend upon their visits daily.



Goldfinch

Leaning a bit more to the premium table fare the goldfinches love tube-type feeders filled with *thistle*. Also called *niger*, this is a small black seed rich in protein and best presented in feeders specially designed to prevent waste.

The finches will also consume *sunflower seeds* but this is a secondary choice at best.

illustrations by Phyllis Saroff



House Sparrow

This member of the weaver finches does not migrate and can be seen at a feeding station the entire year. A bird of indiscriminate taste, the house or English sparrow will eat *cracked corn*, *millet* and *sunflower seeds*.

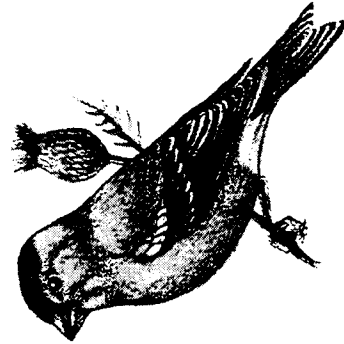
Tufted Titmouse

A common visitor to winter feeding stations, the tufted titmouse more than makes up for his board by consuming large quantities of caterpillars, wasps and spiders. You can encourage this bird with *peanut hearts* and *sunflower seeds*.



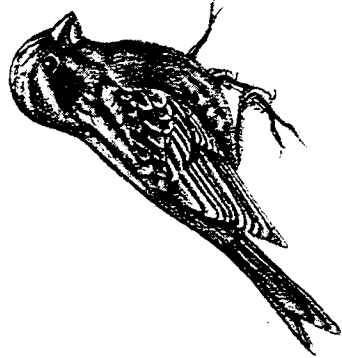
Junco

Now called the dark-eyed junco, and often referred to as the "snow bird," this hardy fellow seems to enjoy winter days. A ready-mixed diet of *millet*, *cracked corn* and *sunflower seeds* are his choices.



White-throated Sparrow

The common choices of *sunflower seeds*, *cracked corn*, *millet* and *peanuts* which are all found in ready mixed feeds are good for this sparrow. Smaller seeds such as *flax*, *thistle*, *niger* and *oats* will also work.



Purple and House Finches

The finches, especially the purple finch, will consume an almost exclusive diet of *sunflower seeds*. The house finch, readily attracted to feeding stations, will utilize a wider range of the seeds found in the ready-mixed seeds, especially *flax*, *millet* and *peanuts*.



Mourning Dove

This gentle game bird has a particularly wide range in food preferences. *Corn*, *wheat*, *sunflower*, *millet* and *oats*, all found in most mixes, will keep the mourning dove around.

The mourning doves are an added bonus to most feeding stations in that they often consume the food spilled on the ground thereby reducing waste.