



## **Backyard Birding: How to Attract & Feed Wild Birds**

Ken Cousino

Quality Feed & Garden Company

4428 N. Main St., Houston, TX 77009, PH. 713-862-2323

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### A. Fun facts about wild birds in Texas

#### 1. What ARE the numbers?

- Tons of habitat -- Regions: 600 miles of marshes and coastline, the Hill Country, changeable West Texas, Tropical South Texas, the rolling plains of Northern Texas, and the East Texas Piney Woods.
- Every year, 400 million birds fly over North America
- 75 percent of all birds in the United States come to Texas, making Texas the number 1 bird watching state in the country! That's why I was so excited to come speak with you today about attracting the different birds that fly through and to your backyard yearly!

#### 2. What species fly overhead in Houston?

- Common ones are Blue Jays, Mockingbird, Cardinal, Hummingbirds, Buntings, Goldfinches, House Wren (sparrows), Woodpeckers, sparrows, 4 species of doves (Inca, Mourning, Whitewing, and Asian Ringnecks), Screech Owls, Hawks & Eagles, Redwing Blackbirds, Red Breasted Robins (that signify spring), and Grackles and MORE!
- [Texas Target Birds Gallery](#)

#### 3. What Winter/Spring species are here right now?

- Jays, Doves, Robins, House Finches, Chipping Sparrows (one of the prettier cousins), Brown headed cowbirds (blackbirds with brown heads), woodpeckers, hawks & eagles, Gold Finches (the famous thistle seed eaters), Cedar Waxwings (pic on top left of your handout, they love Tallow tree berries), Cardinals (did you know you'll only have 1 pair of Cardinals in your backyard at a time, and they LOVE black sunflower?).

- B. Establishing the proper bird environment -- shade and protection
1. Shade -- Trees like Oak, Juniper, Cherry Laurel, Yaupon Holly, Mexican Plum, Fruit trees
  2. Hiding places -- Dense foliage shrubs like Wax Leaf Ligustrum, red tipped philtonia, and a variety of evergreens like juniper and pine
  3. Food bearing shrubs & plants -- American Beauty Berry, Pyracantha, sunflower, milo, & millet
  4. Seasonal flowers that help attract birds (and butterflies) -- Color brings birds and butterflies -- Ageretum, Asters, Blackeyed Susan, Butterfly Bushes, Morning glory and trumpet vines, Milkweed/Butterfly Weed, Lantana, Penta, Phlox, Purple Coneflower, Salvia (the greggei), and Verbena. Best colors for attracting are red and yellow. But anything with fragrance!
- C. What birds need to survive and thrive: tending wildlife increases reliance on YOU!
1. Water: the most essential survival aid for wildlife in the urban setting
    - a. The birdbath: they bathe where they drink?
    - b. Importance of clean water: what a little bleach can do
    - c. Mosquito dunks
  2. Feeders & feeds
    - a. Bird feeders: simple to elaborate -- You can pay more than \$100 on feeders that keep out squirrels and larger birds, that have tons of bells and whistles, or you can make a feeder out of a gourd, pine cone or a pie pan! You can even convert your old panty hose into a bird sock by filling it up with bird seed and hanging it up for your birds! (review handout on some feeder/feeding fun ideas)
    - b. Food types
      1. From seeds to fruit to hummingbird nectar:  
Common foods include black oil sunflowers, striped sunflower, safflower, peanuts, chopped and whole corn, white millet, milo, nuts, and believe it or not, we're now carrying dried meal worms for insect eaters!

2. Seasonal needs -- Increase fat in winter by serving up more nuts, peanut butter, or suet (cakes made typically of lard which woodpeckers LOVE)
3. Story of Grandma's turkey carcass -- I used to love watching the birds destroy our leftover turkey carcass when Thanksgiving dinner was cleaned up! She'd place it in a pan, and place it out with her bird feeders and birds LOVED IT! Unfortunately rats and possums did to! Which leads me to overfeeding.

c. Overfeeding issues

Birds use you to supplement what they find in the wild. Though they'll come at all times of the day, morning feeding is best so all the mess is pretty well cleaned up before nightfall. Clean up what's left to discourage rats and other nighttime wildlife. And that's what Grandma had to do...pick up that ole carcass at night to discourage wildlife she didn't want to feed.

3. Housing

a. From gourds to Purple Martin condos --

There are tons of new bird homes available, and like water and shade, houses are great for providing protection. Not all birds use houses, but those that do will appreciate whatever you provide! Different birds like different housing.

b. Two housing notes

Protect from cold north winds and rain. Placement is vital for usage -  
- Small birds typically nest 6 to 10 feet from the ground. But purple martins and owls won't enter a house that less than 14 ft in the air. Purple martin houses should be out in the open, and owls prefer a nest box in a tree or hidden. Though the purple martin house can be taken down for cleaning, as a general rule, all bird houses should be left up year round to ensure winter protection.

D. Bird watching basics

OK, so now when each of you goes home today, you're gonna start observing birds right? Here's a few simple things to do if you want to take bird watching more seriously:

1. Watch your feeders or visit an area in Houston where bird watching is common
2. Get a close up view by investing in binoculars or a camera with a zoom lens
3. Jot down characteristics like size, color, tail and body type, beak shape, song etc.
4. Then run to your new investment if you haven't done so already -- the Field Guide -- and the one that seems to get the most 5 star rating here is the "Birds of Texas Field Guide"

E. Area organizations & parks for observing wildlife

Just sit back and think about all the places right here in our area that encourage bird watching! Hermann Park, Memorial Park, Bear Creek just to name a few. Link with our local Audobon Society and you'll learn about the Houston Wilderness Organization, George Ranch Historical Park, Buffalo Bayou Partnership (lots of bat watching goes on there!), Greens Bayou Corridor Coalition, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Galveston Island Nature Council, Baytown's Eddie V. Gray Wetlands Center etc. Too many to name here!

F. Threats to our feathered friends

Just in case you hadn't considered it, besides cats, dogs, hawks, owls and other wild animals, one big threat to the health and welfare of birds is you!

1. Use all lawn and garden chemicals carefully (sprays and powders are always better than granules), and natural organic products are by far the best!
2. Watch your trash cause string, wire and plastics are often dangerous to birds.

Threats aside, the bottom line is that bird watching is definitely worth doing in your back yard! It's great that you're exploring it! Thank you all so much for listening today!! Now plant some colorful plants, fill up those bird baths, put out a little feed, and start checking out the birds in your backyard today!!