Migrating Birds, How to Attract

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Perhaps you went an entire summer without seeing a Baltimore oriole, Rose-breasted grosbeak, or Purple martin. Early autumn presents another opportunity to view these striking birds. The weeks between late August and mid October are your ideal window for catching a last-chance glimpse of these birds when they begin migration. You must be prepared, however, to make your yard a migration stopover.

Why are stopover sites necessary?

Understand that even though birds store up fat in preparation for their departure, the physical demands of migration force most birds to rest and refuel several times before they reach their winter territories. Without quality stopover sites to give birds food for replenishment of fat reserves, shelter from predators, and water for hydration, many migrating birds would not make it.

Likewise, on their springtime trips northward to breeding grounds, birds depend upon quality stopover sites not only for survival en route, but also to increase their chances for successful reproduction once they arrive.

What can you do?

Make your yard a well-used stopover by making it as hospitable as possible to migrating birds. There are many factors to the "when and where" of bird stopovers, but the best any of us can do is to keep our feeders and birdbaths clean, well stocked, easy to locate, and free of predators.

We suggest using multiple feeder types, including: seed, suet, fruit, nectar and even insect feeders. The more types of foods you offer, obviously, the bigger the pool of birds likely to visit. Keep them clean and well maintained, so birds do not get sick after using them. Freshen your supply of seed and other foods often, checking it also for signs of rot or mold.

Remember to maintain your birdbaths because birds depend upon a clean, fresh water source. Your birdbath may be the only clean water source on your property. So, keep it clean and filled. With the excellent heaters on the market today, you can even keep a birdbath available as the frost arrives over the winter.

Also, keep your cats indoors during the stopover weeks. Cats kill millions of wild birds each year, and their presence will certainly present a dangerous risk to migrating birds.

Your yard can be a bountiful offering

Your yard is another important source of food for migration stopovers. Your seed and fruit-bearing flowers, shrubs and trees

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may be just the ticket for passing birds. As flowers mature, they produce seeds on which a variety of wild birds and animals can feast, so resist plucking or mowing them down. Likewise, resist raking up fallen fruits. Let the birds scavenge them. Allow your garden to grow wild a few more weeks before turning it over. Even trees make your yard's habitat more appealing to birds. If you must cut a dead tree, consider leaving a portion of the trunk. As you plan additional landscaping for the years to come, consider varieties that provide food for wild birds.

It's also a good idea to keep your nest boxes out. This will give birds on stopover a place to roost and rest, and many bird watchers keep them up all winter to provide shelter from the elements.

The same is true of any natural water sources on your property; you must keep them safe and accessible. This means resisting the use of chemical herbicides and pesticides on the grounds or foliage near them.

To get an idea which wild birds are likely to pass through your area, consult your field guide for summer and winter ranges of migrating birds in your region. If you're located somewhere along a path between a bird's summer and winter ranges, you've got a chance to attract that species to your yard en route.

Recommended Products

Squirrel Be-Gone III Triple Tube Bird Feeder

Microbe-Lift Birdhouse/Birdfeeder Cleaner

EZ - Tilt Heated Birdbath

Pocket Backyard Bird Guide

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