

# Attract Seasonal Wild Birds

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

Whether you're a binocular-toting bird enthusiast or simply want to invite more interesting wildlife to your backyard, having the right housing, feeders, and diet is key to attracting migratory birds. And by understanding the migratory paths of different species in your area, you'll be able to anticipate when and what you'll need to attract them to stay and nest.

Three feathered backyard favorites include: Hummingbirds for their silent hovering, backward flight, and iridescent beauty; Purple Martins for their personality and song; and Bluebirds for their striking coloration and unique feeding habits. If you know when to expect these precious visitors, what to feed them, and how to house them, you'll have better luck attracting and keeping them in your yard.

## Hummingbirds

*Hummingbirds are high-energy favorites that can be found across the South and West virtually all year. Very territorial, they often swoop and dive at one another and may make a variety of clicking or buzzing sounds while competing for flowers and feeders.*

**Migration** - To the North and Northeast, watch for the first signs of them in April and plan to say goodbye around September or October. Their migratory range extends from the Northern United States all the way to Central America and the Caribbean.

**Diet** - Hummingbirds normally feed on flower nectar or fruit for energy, so they are attracted to nectar-filled [bottle feeders](#). To prevent a single hummingbird from monopolizing your feeder, place multiple [feeders](#) at varying heights - different species feed at different levels. Place feeders in a highly-visible, but shady spot. A bush nearby gives an opportunity for them to consider "taking turns" at the feeder. For nectar, you can choose to make your own with sugar and water, or purchase prepared [nectar](#). Cleaning your feeder often is important if you want them to keep returning.

**Interesting Fact:**  
Their wings rotate at the shoulder allowing them to make a forward stroke followed by a backward stroke. Hence they can hover.

**Housing** - To improve your chances of housing hummers near your home, provide downy-like nesting materials to encourage females to stay in your backyard and bring babies to your feeders. Hummingbirds also love to bathe on misted leaves.

## Purple Martins

*These small birds are the largest of the swallow family. Man's fascination with Purple Martins dates back to the Native Americans who used to hollow out gourds to provide nesting houses.*

**Migration** - The Purple Martin migratory route extends from Canada to Brazil, and the birds are seen in all ranges of the United States, predominantly east of the Mississippi and along the Pacific Coast. Spottings occur as early as January 1 in Florida and the Gulf region extending to Texas; from February and March in the middle states; and around April in the northern states. After nesting in North America, they migrate in late fall to South America to molt and grow a new set of feathers.

## Diet

- Voracious insect eaters, Purple Martins can devour up to 2,000 insects per day, even while flying, which is good news for those who wish to significantly reduce the number of insect pests in their backyard. You can invite Purple Martins to stick around your yard by feeding them [mealworms](#) or dried crickets from a special [mealworm feeder](#). They will stay around longer in the fall if fed, as well.

**Interesting Fact:**  
Many enthusiasts today grow gourds, similar to those used by Native Americans, to hollow out and hang for attracting these birds.

**Housing** - With the exception of the West, where nests on cacti and within tree cavities are common, most Purple Martins today depend solely on [man-made houses](#), especially those painted white or pastel. In the eastern and middle states, they are readily seen in backyards. They require large compartments, approximately 6" x 6" x 12", so they can back into the furthest reaches to protect them from the paws, talons and claws of their predators. Mount them on a metal pole, fence post, or electrical conduit 10-20 feet above the ground, and within 15-20 feet of similar-height trees.

## Bluebirds

*With species that range as far north as Alaska and as far south as Central America, bluebirds can be found throughout the United States.*

**Migration** - In some regions, bluebirds have less established migratory patterns, and some will not migrate at all, but will group together for feeding and protection during the winter months. Non-migratory wintering is attributable to the large number of humans providing food supplies, helping ensure they survive food shortages, ice storms, and cold spells. Those that do migrate south of our borders can be found as early as January and February in the southern United States, and around March or April in the middle and northern states.

**Diet** - Feeding bluebirds can be a great way for your family to enjoy and observe these birds. Keeping a stocked mealworm feeder, like the [Dome Feeder](#), is crucial. They can also be fed [suet](#) and specialty feeds, but they are not known to be seed eaters. Bluebirds naturally feed on the ground, so our [Green Solutions Platform Feeder](#) works well. Our [Snacks 'N' Treats™ Feeder](#) is quite popular with bluebirds and humans alike.

**Interesting Fact:**  
Several bluebird enthusiasts have reported little success in attracting bluebirds until they moved their boxes closer to a house or patio area.

**Housing** - To house [bluebirds](#), it is imperative that you offer a [bluebird house](#) made with a [predator guard](#) and without a perch to help protect against competition from sparrows, starlings, and squirrels. The ideal entrance height is 6" above the house floor and the entrance diameter should be about 1-1/2". Also, mount the house on a metal pole 4-5 feet off the ground. You can help establish and build bluebird populations in your area by building a bluebird trail, a series of bluebird boxes placed along, for example, a path or fence line.

## Recommended Products

[HummZinger Excel](#)

[Live Mealworms](#)

[Canned Mealworms](#)

[Dome Feeder](#)